

Southport Seniors Learn Ways To Avoid Food-Borne Illness

Cigarette Butts Lead Big Sweep 'Dirty Dozen' List

BY ELLIN DEVLIN
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Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. That was one of the common-sense tips participants in the Brunswick County Senior Citizens Nutrition Program at Southport received along with a hot lunch recently.

The federally-funded program mandates that participating seniors also receive information that helps them to avoid food-borne illness and to meet their daily nutritional needs. The program is coordinated locally by the Brunswick County Social Services Department, with support from A&T State University's Cooperative Extension Program.

Pearl Stanley, a home economics agent with Brunswick Cooperative Extension Service working with A&T Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist Wilda Wade on the project, says the program is important.

"In 40 years, the elderly population of the United States is expected to double," she said. "If we can provide (the elderly) with programs that keep them healthy, mobile and independent, it will lighten the strain on an already stressed health care system."

"Right now, nursing homes are full and waiting lists are long. Many of our elderly are incapacitated, not necessarily because of age, but because they are more vulnerable to poor nutrition, food borne illness, accidents and over-medication than the rest of the population. We feel that programs such as this will help prevent problems before they become overwhelming."

They presented an hour-long session before lunch. Other sessions cover physical safety, health and proper handling of medication.

"How many of you have ever gotten sick to your stomach after eating food at a picnic or other gathering, especially during warm weather?" Wade asked. "How many of you have come down with a 'flu bug' at unusual times of the year?"

While the problem may have been something eaten, chances are it probably wasn't the food itself that caused the sickness, but what was eaten along with food that wasn't prepared properly.

As a simple rule of thumb to avoid the eight different pathogens



FOOD AND NUTRITION SPECIALIST Wilda Wade (right) answers questions about food safety at the Southport Senior Citizens Nutrition Site.

that cause food poisoning, Wade recommends keeping hot foods hot (160 degrees or hotter—steaming on your plate) and cold foods cold (lower than 40 degrees—refrigerator temperature).

Other tips:

- refrigerate perishables immediately.
- cook all meat, fish and poultry until done, until juices run clear and there is no pink showing when meat is carved.

- wash hands, utensils, cutting boards and counters with hot, soapy water before and after handling food.

- discard any canned food that develops a bulge or a leak.

Food poisoning is more dangerous to the elderly than to the general population as a whole.

Common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever and chills.

Wade said these pathogens are responsible for most cases of food-borne illness in this country:

- Salmonella. Occurs in raw or un-

dercooked meat, eggs and in unpasteurized dairy products and apple cider. Onset is 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food. Duration is two to seven days.

- Campylobacter jejuni—similar to Salmonella.

- Perfringens. Occurs in cooked meat or soups, gravy and stew that have been left at 60 degrees to 125 degrees for hours. Onset is 8 to 20 hours and duration is one day.

- Staphylococcal. Occurs in custards, cooked meat, potato and pasta salads, baked beans that have been kept at room temperature too long. Onset is 2 to 8 hours and duration is one to two days.

- E.Coli 015787. Occurs in raw and undercooked meat and unpasteurized milk. Onset and duration vary. Can be deadly to the young and elderly, with complications that cause blood clots on the brain and kidney failure.

- Listeriosis. Occurs in raw milk or cheese made from contaminated raw milk. Also found in undercooked meat and poultry and in fish smoked at low temperatures. Onset is usually

within 24 hours of ingestion, but can occur up to 12 days later.

- Vibriosis. Occurs in raw seafood, particularly shellfish. Onset is 3 to 76 hours, with duration of one to eight days.

- Botulism. Occurs in improperly canned, low-acid, unrefrigerated food. Onset is in 12 to 36 hours. Paralysis, difficulty swallowing, double vision, respiratory and cardiac failure. Usually fatal.

"Our elderly population has the potential to be far more vibrant, productive and healthy than we realize," said Stanley. "All they need is the awareness and education to succeed. Healthy food and good education all work together."

For more information on food safety, contact Stanley at 253-4425 or the USDA Food Safety hotline toll-free number, 1-800-535-4555.

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In Brunswick County and all along the North Carolina coast, cigarette butts lead the "dirty dozen" list of litter collected during the annual Big Sweep clean-up day.

The 1993 waterway clean-up will be held Sept. 18 on Holden, Ocean Isle and Sunset beaches. Volunteers will meet at 10 a.m. under the Holden Beach bridge; at the Museum of Coastal Carolina, Ocean Isle Beach; and in the parking lot of Sunset Boulevard, Sunset Beach.

In last year's coastal Big Sweep efforts, 112,409 cigarette butts were collected, some 39.57 percent of the total haul.

Next came plastic food bags/wrappers; 4.85 percent; metal beverage cans, 4.16 percent; paper pieces, 3.94 percent; plastic pieces, 3.92 percent; foamed plastic pieces, 3.66 percent; and plastic beverage bottles, plastic straws, plastic caps/lids, glass pieces, glass beverage bottles and foamed plastic cups, all less than 2 percent.

Nationally, cigarette butts also topped the litter list, with 775,438 collected.

While cigarette butts top the "dirty dozen" list for both the coastal and inland areas, findings in the two areas differ substantially. Plastic food bags and wrappers placed second along the coast, and glass beverage bottles come in at second place inland.

Plastic comprised the greatest volume of debris collected in North Carolina—56.08 percent coastal and 46 percent inland.

The only significant trend recorded is a substantial drop in bottles and associated goods. That figure dropped to 11 percent in 1992.

In the Big Sweep of 1992, all Brunswick County beaches yielded 9,965 tons of trash. Holden Beach workers picked up 1,920 pounds; Sunset, 1,260; and Ocean Isle, 5,660.

In the upcoming sweep, garbage bags and gloves will be distributed to teams assigned to a particular portion of the strand on each beach. On Sunset, reporting forms also will be given for recording every item that goes into the bag, something not done on the other beaches.

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