

MEMO

TO: All Staff
FROM: The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
and ConAgra Foods' Home Food Safety program
SUBJECT: Keep the Office Fridge Safe

According to a recent survey from the Home Food Safety program, virtually all work places now have a refrigerator, and 67 percent of those surveyed say they store their lunch in the refrigerator. Frighteningly, more than 20 percent said that their office fridge is rarely or never cleaned and 18 percent said they have no idea if theirs is cleaned at all.

Keep it Cool!

Not sure what the temperature is in your office refrigerator? Refrigerator temperatures fluctuate, especially from season to season. The best way to regulate your refrigerator is with a refrigerator thermometer. Set the thermometer in the center of the middle shelf (not on the door) and keep it inside at all times. Most importantly, check the temperature regularly to be sure your food is stored safely below 40° F! Your coworkers will thank you!

Manage Your Own Leftovers

Most perishable foods have a shelf life of just three to five days, don't wait for the clean-up crew to throw out your leftovers: Label and date your food and make sure to toss it in a timely fashion. If you aren't sure how old something is, remember, when in doubt, throw it out!

When cleaning prepackaged food out of the office fridge remember:

- ✓ "Use by" or "best if used by" date is not a safety-related date. It's the last date recommended for use of the product at optimal quality.
- ✓ "Expiration" date means don't consume the product after this date.

Safe Cleaning

- ✓ USDA recommends placing an opened box of baking soda on a shelf to keep the refrigerator smelling fresh and help eliminate odors.
- ✓ Always follow the manufacturer's cleaning instructions.
- ✓ Avoid using solvent cleaning agents, abrasives, and all cleansers that may impart a chemical taste to food or ice cubes, or cause damage to the interior finish of your refrigerator.
- ✓ The exterior may be cleaned with a soft cloth and mild liquid dishwashing detergent as well as cleansers and polishes that are made for appliance use.
- ✓ The front grill should be kept free of dust and lint to permit free air flow to the condenser. Several times a year the condenser coil should be cleaned with a brush or vacuum cleaner to remove dirt, lint or other accumulations.
- ✓ Don't forget to clean the refrigerator handle, too! That is the part of the office fridge that gets touched countless times a day!

Removing Odors

If food has spoiled in a refrigerator and odors from the food remain, they can be difficult to remove. The following steps may have to be repeated.

- ✓ Wipe inside of fridge with equal parts vinegar and water. Vinegar provides acid which destroys mildew.
- ✓ Wash inside of fridge with a solution of baking soda and water. Be sure to scrub the gaskets, shelves, sides and door. Allow to air out several days.
- ✓ Sprinkle fresh coffee grounds or baking soda loosely in the bottom of the fridge, or place them in an open container.
- ✓ Place a cotton swab soaked with vanilla inside freezer. Close door for 24 hours, then check again for odors.

Share the Responsibility

If your office doesn't already have a schedule for cleaning, create one. Post a copy of our downloadable Refrigerator Calculator found at www.homefoodsafety.org on your office fridge to remind your coworkers of the life of their leftovers.

