

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

MyHealthTALK

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Courtesy of Asset Health



FOOD FRAUD ON THE RISE

Our food supply chain has a 60 percent increase in fraud this year. Food fraud is an emerging public health risk that is global, complex and costs the U.S. more than \$10 million annually. Lawn grass and leaves are being found in tea bags, sugars in so-called pure honey, and escolar fish in cans labeled tuna, according to a study published in the *Journal of Food Science*. Food scientists say that 7 percent of the food in our supply chain contains imposter ingredients.

Some food companies are cutting down on authentic ingredients that are supposed to be in a product and substituting cheaper substances. Unscrupulous manufacturers are adding fillers to foods, mixing cheap spices with expensive ones and diluting liquids. Food fraud is most common in foods that we eat every day. Olive oil, milk, honey, coffee, tea, juices and fish are high on the list of adulterated foods.

So are spices, maple syrup, and beverages with clouding agents. Spices frequently altered include black pepper, turmeric, paprika and chili powder.

“We suspect that what we know about the topic is just the tip of the iceberg,” said Dr. Jeffrey Moore, senior scientific liaison for the U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention (USP). “There is a general sense that food fraud is a major global problem for the food industry.”

Complicating the problem is the fact that counterfeit ingredients are very difficult—if not impossible—for consumers to detect. Health risks could be serious, such as when someone allergic to peanuts has a severe reaction to olive oil cut with peanut oil. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines food fraud as the deliberate substitution, addition, tampering or

misrepresentation of food or ingredients.

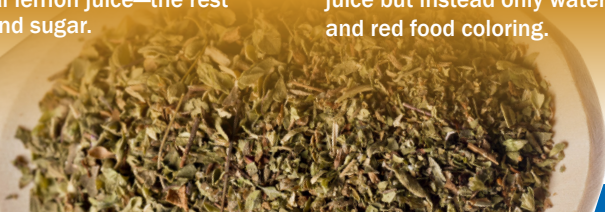
USP is a watchdog group, a scientific nonprofit organization that helps set standards for the quality and safety of foods and medicines. USP conducts tests on foods and has a searchable online database on food fraud at www.foodfraud.org/.

Minimizing Food Fraud Risks

1. Educate yourself and be aware of your senses. Does a food look, smell and taste right? Search online to find out whether a particular brand or product has been reported as fraudulent.
2. Purchase ‘whole’ food when the option is available. Instead of lemon juice, buy lemons. Buy whole spices, e.g., peppercorns, cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon sticks, and grind or grate them at home. Loose-leaf tea is a better option than a tea bag.
3. Stay away from the newest health trends, particularly the expensive ones. Food fraud is most common in high priced foods that are linked to health benefits.
4. Stick with brands that you trust. Buy from reputable sources such as your local farmers market, co-op or natural food store.
5. Beware of white or albacore tuna—it may not be a member of the tuna family at all. It has become common to market escolar as albacore tuna, super white tuna, king tuna or butterfish. Escolar is edible and reportedly delicious; however, it can cause acute gastrointestinal distress because it contains a waxy substance, gempylotoxin, that humans can’t digest.

COMMON FRAUDULENT FOODS

- Extra-virgin olive oil diluted with cheaper oils derived from hazelnuts, corn, sunflowers, vegetables and soybeans.
- Spices containing stems, industrial dyes, and synthetic or carcinogenic substances.
- So-called pure honey blended with corn syrup, fructose, glucose and/or beet sugar.
- Pure lemon juice containing only 10-35 percent of real lemon juice—the rest being water and sugar.
- Coffee grounds mixed with twigs, roasted corn, barley and parchment.
- Milk adulterated with milk powder, urea, rennet, oil, detergent, caustic soda and/or skim milk powder.
- Saffron, the most expensive spice in world, containing glycerin, sandalwood dust, tartrazine (linked to hyperactivity and lupus), barium sulfate and/or borax.
- Pomegranate juice containing no real juice but instead only water, citric acid and red food coloring.





DOUBLE TROUBLE WITH NOROVIRUS AND FLU EPIDEMIC

As if we haven't had enough sickness during this severe influenza season, a new, highly contagious norovirus is making even the healthiest people miserable. Norovirus can live in and outside of the human body for up to two weeks, and an estimated half of us may get it.

The new norovirus originated in Australia and is called the Sydney strain. Symptoms include abdominal cramps, diarrhea, projectile vomiting, dehydration, and sometimes, the feeling that you've just been hit by a bus. Sydney is an acute gastrointestinal virus, expected to make 21 million people ill this year, causing an estimated 70,000 hospitalizations and 800 deaths. Norovirus is a potent bug—there is no treatment for it, no vaccine, and it is tough to kill. Cleaning without bleach won't remove it, and neither will hand sanitizer. It takes only a few particles of norovirus to infect someone. Worst of all, people can spread norovirus before they have symptoms and for up to two weeks after getting better.

The Sydney Norovirus comes riding on the back of the H3N2 virus, which officially reached epidemic proportions in January. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), H3N2 alone is creating a severe flu season this year. Symptoms of H3N2 include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, body aches and fatigue.

Cold and flu viruses spread like an aerosol, especially in confined environments. When someone coughs or sneezes, minute droplets can reportedly travel a distance of 10 to 20 feet. Seasonal flu causes 200,000 hospitalizations a year and between 3,000 and 49,000 deaths, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

If you are like most people with H3N2, with plenty of fluids and rest, you will recover on your own in five to seven days. However, you should visit the emergency room immediately if you have difficulty breathing, chest pain, a high fever, a cough that improves—then worsens, or if you are unable to keep down fluids due to nausea and vomiting.

According to Mayo Clinic, the typical flu bug lives for up to 48 hours on door handles, faucets, computer keyboards, remote controls and other nonporous surfaces. Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body. Most healthy adults are contagious one day before symptoms begin and five to seven days after becoming sick. You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you have it. According to the CDC, you can be infected with the flu virus, have no symptoms, and still be contagious.

Protect Yourself

1. Get an annual flu shot.
2. Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water, especially when in contact with door handles, shopping carts, stair railings, before eating or preparing food, and after using the restroom.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands, especially when in public.
4. Keep household surfaces clean, during and after sickness.
5. Keep to yourself if you are infected. Stay at home for 48 hours after your symptoms disappear.
6. Avoid close contact with sick people.
7. Practice good health habits. Get adequate sleep and exercise, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat healthy foods.
8. Talk to your doctor about antiviral medications if you are caring for someone with the flu.



Pamper Yourself

1. Talk to your doctor about antiviral medications.
2. Drink plenty of fluids.
3. Stay at home.
4. Rest and recover.
5. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the crook of your elbow.
6. Use a humidifier to relieve nasal congestion and sore throat pain.
7. Go ahead and enjoy a bowl of chicken soup, which may have healing and anti-inflammatory effects.