

Your Healthy Eating Questions Answered
by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Q: Do white patches on frozen food mean it's unsafe to eat?

A: No. Those white, dried-out patches of “freezer burn” affect the quality, but not the safety of frozen food. To avoid the somewhat altered flavor that freezer burn causes, wrap food well before freezing in heavyweight foil, freezer paper or freezer bags, pushing air out before sealing. Freezer containers are also fine, as long as they have a good seal.

Q: Should I buy farmed or wild salmon?

A: One way to increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids, which may help protect against cancer, heart disease and arthritis, is to eat salmon. USDA data show that the total fat content of farmed salmon is slightly higher than that of wild salmon (probably because these fish get less activity), but the amount of highly desirable omega-3 fat is about the same. The vitamin, mineral and protein content of the two varieties is also basically the same. Although there is concern about the effect of farm-raised seafood on the environment and native seafood populations, we need more information about such issues before drawing conclusions.

Q: Alfalfa sprouts used to carry safety warnings. Are they still considered unsafe?

A: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has updated its health advisory about eating raw sprouts because of a recent outbreak of E. coli linked to alfalfa sprouts. Past outbreaks associated with raw sprouts have involved salmonellosis. Although only a few outbreaks have occurred in the last two years, such food borne illnesses can be serious when they do.

Sprouts that have been cooked thoroughly are not likely to pose any risk. Raw sprouts pose the most danger to children, the elderly and others with weaker immune systems due to HIV infection, diabetes or other illnesses. These people are advised to avoid raw sprouts completely. At restaurants and delis, they should order sandwiches and salads without raw alfalfa or mung bean sprouts.

Q: Is heartburn caused by what I eat?

A: Heartburn occurs when the acid contents of the stomach go up into the esophagus (the throat tube that connects the mouth to the stomach) and irritates the tissue there. Besides being uncomfortable, it is believed that over time this irritation increases the risk of esophageal cancer, which has risen dramatically in the last 30 years.

Smoking and obesity seem to be important causes of this acid reflux. It may be that overeating stretches the stomach and causes acid reflux. For some people, unusual anatomical or hormonal factors might be the cause. What we do know is that frequent heartburn can cause damage and should not be ignored. Be sure to discuss persistent heartburn with your doctor. If an unhealthy diet, weight or lifestyle is the cause, it would be best to solve these problems, since they have other negative health effects.

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