

Listeriosis in Leftovers?

With the changing of seasons and Holiday's right around the corner, you may soon find your fridge stocked to the brim. Your favorite restaurants are closed for the off season. Teton County is slowing down from a crazy summer, and on top of that it's cold outside! If you're anything like me, now is the best time to prepare your most favorite meals in the comfort of your own home. So, what can you find in your fridge? At my house, you will find raw meat and poultry, unwashed vegetables, dairy products and deli meats. Now go ahead, look inside your refrigerator.

What you may not notice is what's lurking inside of your ingredients and leftovers: the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* which, when ingested, can cause a serious illness known as Listeriosis. [It is estimated that 1,600 individuals are infected each year, and about 260 of those infections result in death.](#) The older the food in your refrigerator, the higher the chance of this harmful bacteria growing. What's worse is that *Listeria* can grow on refrigerated foods!

What is *Listeria Monocytogenes*?

Listeria is a species of disease-causing bacteria that can be found in moist environments, water, soil, decaying vegetation and animals. It is transmitted to food when it's harvested, processed, prepared, packaged, transported, or stored in contaminated environments. Associated foods include raw meat and poultry, fresh soft cheese, paté, smoked seafood, deli meats and deli salads. Listeriosis has a 20-30% mortality rate; fortunately for us this illness is rare but can be very serious.

What are the symptoms and treatment?

Depending on the severity of the illness, symptoms may last from days to several weeks. Symptoms may include fever, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. As the sickness becomes more severe you may experience headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions. The sickness is most likely to affect individuals who are immunocompromised: pregnant women and their newborns, adults aged 65 or older, children, and those with weakened immune systems. Symptoms usually don't start for 1-4 weeks after eating contaminated foods and some people have reported symptoms starting as late as 70 days after exposure! Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics.

How can I prevent Listeriosis?

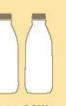
1. Chill at the right temperature. Put a thermometer in the refrigerator and adjust the temperature control as necessary. Your refrigerator should register at 41°F (4°C) or below and your freezer at 0°F (-18°C).
2. Use ready-to-eat foods quickly! *Listeria* has a higher chance of growing if food is stored in the refrigerator for long periods of time. Use ready-to-eat, refrigerated foods by the Use-By Date on the package labeling. If your food is homemade, eat or throw it away within 7 days.
3. Keep the refrigerator clean. Wipe up spills immediately. Clean the inside walls and shelves with hot water and liquid dishwash detergent. Rinse and let air dry.

Take away:

L. Monocytogenes is a bacteria found in the natural environment that can contaminate foods sometime between processing and landing on your table. Listeria causes serious illness, especially in the immunocompromised. You can easily prevent sickness by keeping refrigerated foods at 41°F (4°F) or lower, eating food in a timely manner, and keeping your refrigerator clean. It is especially important to know the age of the foods in your refrigerator. The expiration dates on package labels are an important date to note. If you have homemade food stored in your refrigerator, all leftovers should be eaten or thrown out within 7 days. For more information, including which foods are higher risk, see the chart below.

Who has a higher risk of getting *Listeria* food poisoning?

Lessons from *Listeria* outbreaks: Food poisoning can happen to anyone. Each year, about 48 million people in the US (1 in 6) get sick from eating contaminated food. It can be especially dangerous for pregnant women and their newborns; older adults; and people with immune systems weakened by cancer, cancer treatments, or other serious conditions (like diabetes, kidney failure, liver disease, and HIV/AIDS). *Listeria* is a prime example of how germs that contaminate food can cause sickness and death in these groups.

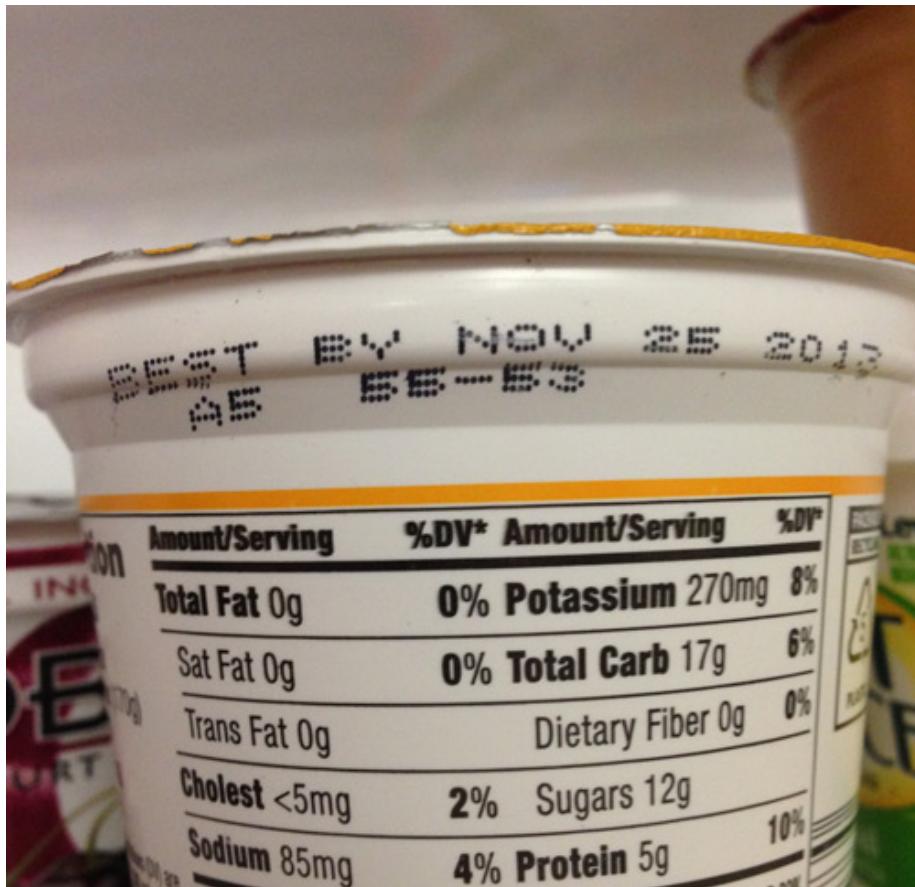
Pregnant women, fetuses, and newborn infants	People with weakened immune systems
 Listeria can pass from pregnant women to their fetuses and newborns. It can cause miscarriages, stillbirths, and newborn deaths.  Chancy cheese <small>LISTERIA OUTBREAK: Queso fresco (a type of soft cheese) sickened 142 people, killed 10 newborns and 18 adults, and caused 20 miscarriages.</small>	 Listeria can spread through the bloodstream to cause meningitis, and often kills. The weaker your immune system, the greater the risk.  Contaminated celery <small>LISTERIA OUTBREAK: Pre-cut celery in chicken salad served at hospitals sickened 10 people who had other serious health problems. Five of them died as a result.</small>
Adults 65 or older	What foods are risky?
 Listeria can spread through the bloodstream to cause meningitis, and often kills. The older you are, the greater the risk.  Tainted cantaloupes <small>LISTERIA OUTBREAK: Contaminated whole cantaloupes sickened 147 people in 28 states and caused one of the deadliest foodborne outbreaks in the US. There were 33 deaths, mostly in adults over 65, reported during the outbreak.</small>	<p>When it comes to <i>Listeria</i>, some foods are more risky than others. Meet some of the other foods where <i>Listeria</i> is known to hide.</p>  Raw Sprouts  Raw Milk (unpasteurized)  Soft Cheeses  Smoked Seafood

SOURCE: CDC, 2013

Image from CDC.gov



Listeria monocytogenes. Image taken from CDC.gov.



Package date marking. The "best by" or "use by" date should never be ignored. Image taken from Assemblies.com.

Amount/Serving	%DV*	Amount/Serving	%DV*
Total Fat 0g	0%	Potassium 270mg	8%
Sat Fat 0g	0%	Total Carb 17g	6%
Trans Fat 0g		Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Cholest <5mg	2%	Sugars 12g	
Sodium 85mg	4%	Protein 5g	10%

Helpful Links:

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(Espanol\)](#)

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)

[Medical News Today](#)