



Excellent eggs – handle them safely

Eggs are a simple, cost effective and nutritious part of our diet but egg shells can be contaminated by Salmonella on the outside when they are laid. This is particularly true for uncooked dishes, sauces and dressings containing raw or lightly cooked eggs. These include uncooked desserts like mousses and tiramisu; sauces and dressings such as hollandaise; fresh mayonnaise, and aioli; drinks containing raw egg such as egg nog, health shakes with added raw egg; and steak tartare. These foods are risky because the eggs they contain are eaten uncooked and so need to be handled safely.

Dishes containing raw eggs as an ingredient, that aren't going to be cooked before being eaten, should not be served to vulnerable people such as small children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems who are at greater risk from food poisoning. Egg meals should be cooked for these vulnerable people, for example until the yolk of a boiled egg has started to become firm or eggs have become set in omelettes or scrambled eggs. Another alternative for vulnerable groups and other consumers who want to have egg dishes that aren't fully cooked is to use pasteurised eggs.

Follow these tips to minimise your risk of food poisoning from eating eggs:

- Do not buy cracked or dirty (e.g. visible hen poo, feathers) eggs. These are more likely to be contaminated with Salmonella. Bring the presence of any eggs like this to the attention of the seller as it against food safety legislation to sell cracked and dirty eggs. If eggs get a crack in them while you handle or transport them, it's safest to discard them or cook them thoroughly as soon as possible, for example in a baked cake.
- Stop and think about where in the hen an egg comes from. It's always important to follow good hygiene when handling eggs, even when they look clean, so as to not transfer 'poo' contamination from the egg shell surface to the egg contents or other foods you are handling that are not going to be cooked.
- If you accidentally drop pieces of shell into your egg mixture while preparing food, it could contaminate the mixture and it will need thorough cooking. Remove the shell pieces with a clean spoon or fork.
- Wash your hands with soap and running water and dry thoroughly after handling eggs so you don't contaminate other food.
- If you are not going to cook the eggs further, don't separate the yolk from the white using the shell as that could contaminate either part of the raw egg. Invest in an egg separator.
- Prepare raw egg foods just before you are going to consume them and if you need to store the dish refrigerate it immediately at 5°C or below, so the bacteria cannot grow.
- Keep your eggs refrigerated and store them away from ready to eat foods. They will keep better if you store them in the cardboard box you purchased them and you will be able to check the best before date and have access to the information you need in the rare case there is a food recall.

For more information see www.foodsafety.asn.au