Campylobacteriosis: Attack of the meaty bacteria!

Dear Alice,

I may have not cooked my chicken thoroughly enough. I saw some raw chicken in the middle and I threw it away. I defrosted it and turned the chicken on all its sides in the frying pan. I saw something about camplobacteria or something. I'm a little scared because I ate some of the chicken, which I believe was cooked, but I don't know if I was exposed to raw chicken that I may have swallowed. I'd appreciate your advice.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Great attention to detail for noticing before you ate all of your chicken! Campylobacter is a family of bacteria that lives on raw meats and poultry, unpasteurized milk, contaminated water supplies, and sometimes in the intestinal tracts of animals and people. Folks who eat or drink campylobacter often get an infection called campylobacteriosis. Signs of the illness usually appear between two to five days after exposure, and include:

- Abdominal pain and/or cramps
- Diarrhea (which may be bloody)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever

In most cases, the infection will go away on its own within a week without any lingering side effects, thanks to the good ol' immune system. Small children, and people who are elderly or who have weakened immune systems (such as those who have HIV/AIDS or are on chemotherapy) can become seriously ill and need medical attention, hospitalization, or antibiotics.

Although campylobacter is a common cause of diarrhea and stomach upset, getting it can be prevented by following some simple food safety tips:

- **Keep it COOL.** Thaw meats in the refrigerator, not on the countertop. If you're not going to reheat leftovers to their original piping hot temperature (about 165 degrees), eat them cold right outta the fridge (standing with the fridge door open while you chow last night's cold pizza is optional). Any meat or poultry that is not going to be eaten within the next day or two needs to be frozen.
- **NOT mixing it up.** Use separate cutting boards and utensils for meats and veggies, and
be sure to wash any surface or utensil that has come into contact with raw and undercooked meat with soap and warm water BEFORE you use them for non-meat items. Put cooked meats on fresh serving dishes, not the same ones that held the raw meats. Remember? a single drop of juice from uncooked or undercooked chicken can have enough bacteria to keep you driving the porcelain bus for an entire week.

- **Make it HOT.** Bacteria can't stand the heat. Internal temperatures of 160 degrees (for meat) and 180 degrees (for chicken) will destroy any bacteria (including campylobacter) that might be on your food. Use a meat thermometer to make sure that things are steaming. Any juices that run from chicken when it's cut need to be clear and nearly colorless, not pink.

For more tips on how to keep raw chicken and other food products from ruffling your feathers, you can check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service website [2]. A few simple tips and you're on the way to enjoying many worry-free meals. Chow down!

Alice!
Category:  
General Health [3]  
Stomach & Other Gastrointestinal Grumblings [4]

**Related questions**

- Handwashing do's and don'ts [5]  
- Forgot to refrigerate leftovers? Still okay to eat? [6]  
- Does soap kill germs? [7]  
- What's that growing in the refrigerator?!? A guide for storing and eating leftovers [8]

**Resources**

- Medical Services (Morningside) [9]  
- Medical Services (CUMC) [10]

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