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SECTION D



DANIEL NEMAN

## Food safety has a price; would you pay it?

How much would you pay to know for certain that the food you are about to eat will not make you sick?

Diseases spread by foods strike an estimated 76 million people every year in this country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The illnesses are severe enough to lead to 325,000 hospitalizations each year, and an estimated 5,000 deaths.

But most food-borne illnesses are preventable. Ethylene gas can be removed during processing and electron beam irradiation can be employed to reduce contaminants.

The problem is, these processes and others cost money. So how much would you spend for safer food?

A recent study conducted by the Ohio State University and University of Maine looked at just that question.

Ohio State's Brian Roe and Maine's Mario Teisl sought to determine how much money people would pay to avoid the unpleasantness of getting sick from food. Other studies, including a 2008 analysis by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, look only at how much money is lost to health care, missed work, and the like. The Roe and Teisl study tried to take in the whole cost, emotional and physical as well as financial, of what happens when people are sickened by their food.

The clever way of addressing this question was a survey filled out by a rather large sample of 3,511 people. Mr. Roe and Mr. Teisl presented the respondents with a hypothetical package of hot dogs or hamburger and then suggested a price for the regular package and a higher price for a package that had been treated in a way to eliminate such common food-borne pathogens as E. coli and listeria.

It turns out people have a limit to how much they will spend to be certain, or at least reasonably certain, that the food they are buying will be safe.

If the treated package is only 10 cents more than the untreated package, about 60 percent said they would go ahead and pay the extra dime. But if the cost for the treated package were \$1.60 more, only one-third of the respondents said they would shell out the extra money.

This information leads to a couple of points. The survey apparently did not ask the 40 percent of respondents why they would choose the risk of food poisoning rather than pay the dime to make sure their food is safer. One reason, of course, is that many of them might not be able to afford 10 more cents for their food. But another reason could be that they figure that the likelihood of becoming ill from the food already is so slight that they need not pay more to reduce it.

Have you ever become sick from hamburger or hot dogs? How much would it be worth to you, per package, to assure it never happens again? Ten cents? Fifty cents? A dollar? Two dollars?

The same study suggests that, on average, Americans would be willing to spend a little more than a dollar per year for a 10 percent reduction in the possibility that the hamburger they buy at a supermarket will be contaminated by E. coli.

In total, that meant Americans were willing to pay \$305 million for a significant, though not overwhelming, reduction in their risk of getting sick. And we would be willing to pay a total of \$40 million (7.5 cents per person) each year to be 10 percent safer from the less common listeria pathogen in hot dogs.

It's not a lot of money, but then again, it's also not a whole lot safer. Technically, it would be possible to completely eradicate all food-borne pathogens from food. But experts agree the cost would be so high it could not be afforded.

How much would you pay?  
Contact Daniel Neman at dneman@theblade.com or 419-724-6155.



# refresh

## BEAT THE HEAT WITH COOL SUMMERTIME COCKTAILS

By DANIEL NEMAN  
BLADE FOOD EDITOR

So many summertime cocktails. So many reasons to reach for one. Eleanor Maxwell, editor of *The Ultimate Cocktail Book*, which came out last week, cites the glamour of cocktails and their implied association with the Golden Age of Hollywood. In summer they are especially popular because they fit easily into plans for socializing and entertainment, she wrote in an e-mail.

"And let's not forget the obvious — cocktails are a treat, and when will indulging and spoiling ourselves go out of fashion?" she wrote.

Or you could look at it this way: They're good for you. Juniper berries, the main flavoring agent for gin, are a diuretic and are thought by some to help control diabetes. Lemons can help reduce the chances of developing kidney stones. Citrus juices are an important source of Vitamin C and are helpful in preventing scurvy.

How many drinkers do you know with scurvy? And then there are cocktails' more obvious benefits. On a hot summer's day, they provide cool refreshment — just picture a colorful concoction inside a chilled glass with drops of cold condensation dripping down the outside. Now picture yourself sipping from it. Ahhh, that's the stuff.

Are cocktails' exotic, enticing names part of their appeal? Perhaps not, but they can't hurt. Who could turn down the danger and mystery of a Singapore Gin Sling? Who could resist the delicacy of a Hummingbird or the power of a French 75 — named for a particularly deadly type of artillery? What could be more pleasantly lethal than a Black Widow?

When contemplating summertime cocktails, it is perhaps best to start with where they

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## COOKBOOKS

# Simple can be best when it comes to making dinner

By NATALIE HAUGHTON  
LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

Do you need help with that nagging question of "what's for dinner?"

You'll find plenty of options with upscale, contemporary, and international flavors in *Radically Simple: Brilliant Flavors With Breathtaking Ease*, by Rozanne Gold (Rodale Books; \$35) and *Real Simple Dinner Tonight: Done! 189 Quick and Delicious Recipes*, edited by Allie Lewis Clapp and Lygeia Grace (Time Home Entertainment Inc.; \$24.95).

"My goal is to ramp up the ease of preparing great food every day," says Ms. Gold, a former chef who "believes the best food in the world is often the simplest." She shares 325 fresh recipe ideas with a bit of "chef thinking" in each. "Radically simple food and real cooking are, in fact, soulmates."

"Cooking from scratch does not need to take a long time or be difficult," adds Ms. Clapp, Real Simple's food director and the mother of a 2-year-old. Culled from columns in the magazine, the book's recipes

"are meant for real people cooking real dinners every night of the week."

"This is my style of cooking and the life of so many people," says Ms. Clapp, adding that "if you care about the health of your family, it takes only a little longer to prepare a home-cooked meal than to pick up takeout."

Ms. Gold's latest cookbook, her 12th, features her expanded ideas "where the interplay of time, technique, and es-

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