Why Romaine Lettuce and Spinach Keep Trying To Kill Us, and What We Can Do About It

Last week the news told us to throw out your romaine lettuce. Food-safety investigators traced the recent romaine lettuce *E. coli* outbreak to growing fields in California, but regulators still say it's unsafe to eat the leafy green in 10 states including New York. As a result of this, the FDA is interested in creating a new labeling standard that would require companies to show where their lettuce comes from. Let's take a look at Food Poisoning and its link to factory farming, and then we'll go over supplements that can kill food born pathogens.

E. Coli, *Salmonella*, and Other Foodborne Illnesses

The foodborne agents causing death the majority of deaths are

> *Salmonella (31%), Listeria (28%), Toxoplasma (21%), Norwalklike Virus (7%), Campylobacter (6%), and STEC E. coli (4%) (Meade 1999).”*
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> *For most of these agents, the clinical case fatality rate from foodborne infection is less than 1% but note that for Listeria and Toxoplasma the clinical case fatality rate is 20%. Note also that these averages obscure strong relationships between important factors, such as age and co-morbidity, and disease risk. — John M. Gay*

Not all *E. coli* is bad. You probably have more than one kind of *E. coli* in your gut right now. It’s a normal part of our healthy bacteria, and they help us digest food, amongst other things. *E. coli* O157:H7, on the other hand, is pathogenic and can cause bloody diarrhea, sometimes cause kidney failure, and even death.

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E. coli cause disease when the bacteria produces a toxin called Shiga toxin. These bacteria are called “Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli,*” or STEC for short. O157 is the most common STEC identified in the U.S.

> *When you hear news reports about outbreaks of E. coli infections, they are usually talking about E. coli O157.” — CDC*

The CDC estimates that STEC causes 265,000 illness, 3,600 hospitalizations, and 30 deaths yearly in the U.S.

Trump’s FDA, responding to pressure from the farm industry, delayed the water-testing rules for at least four more years. *E. coli* O157:H7 is believed to have evolved from *E. coli* O55:H7. That strain is also resistant to antibiotics and acidity and can be pathogenic, but O157 is more antibiotic

resistant, more able to resist acidity, and more likely to make us sick. Antibiotic resistance allows the bacteria to not just survive, but to thrive in an environment where antibiotics are being administered. The reason for this is when you wipe out competing microbes, the few survivors can proliferate. Factory farming is likely to blame for much the E. coli in our lettuce, and it's possible that the O157 variant wouldn't even exist without factory farming.

E. Coli O157:H7 doesn't always make us sick, but people with weaker immune systems are much more susceptible.

And there's also the well-known bacteria, *salmonella*, which is said to be the most common cause of foodborne illness in the U.S. There are actually more than 2,000 different types of *salmonella* bacteria and these bacteria can cause several types of infection. Most often, these bacteria cause gastroenteritis, but they can also cause typhoid fever, a more serious infection.

Salmonella enterica serovar Typhimurium subtype DT104 appears to be the most likely *Salmonella* to give us serious trouble, It's drug-resistant and becoming more and more widespread both in the U.S. and internationally. Again, we have factory farming to blame.

The CDC says that *Salmonella* is responsible for approximately 1.2 million illnesses a year in the United States, with 23,000 hospitalizations and 450 deaths. Most people infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps. The illness typically runs for 4 to 7 days, and most recover without treatment. Stomach acid tends to destroy *Salmonella.* One must consume a large amount of the bacteria for an infection to develop unless people have a deficiency of stomach acid. This makes those on acid-indigestion medications more susceptible.

We also have factory farming to thank for many of the

Campylobacter outbreaks. Though it's not commonly reported, Campylobacter bacteria infects an estimated 2.4 million people yearly, making it one of the most common foodborne illnesses, according to the CDC. It's generally mild and often unnoticed but it can occasionally kill those with weak immune systems. Campylobacter lives in the intestinal tract of birds and can be transmitted from bird to bird through common drinking water and feces contact.

Norovirus, Toxoplasmosis, and Listeria round out the five most common culprits of food poisoning in America. Noroviruses and Toxoplasmosis aren't infections that can be tied to factory farming. Listeria doesn't have a mutated cousin that we can blame factory farming for, but just like with other foodborne infections, poor food handling, and poor animal welfare standards do play a large part, and factory farming is often responsible for contaminating produce with Listeria.

> *When medical researchers at the University of Minnesota took more than 1,000 food samples from multiple retail markets, they found evidence of fecal contamination in 69% of the pork and beef and 92% of the poultry samples. Nine out of ten chicken carcasses in the store may be contaminated with fecal matter. And half of the poultry samples were contaminated with the UTI-causing E. coli bacteria." – Dr. Michael Greger*

How Factory Farming Is Poisoning Our Vegetables

We believe that raw fruits, vegetables, and herbs are absolutely critical to achieving great health, especially when one is attempting to heal from disease. But the CDC reports that around half of all foodborne illnesses are actually caused by raw produce. How does this happen?

Cattle, pig, and poultry factories dump millions of gallons of

putrefying waste into massive open-air cesspools, which leak and contaminate nearby water sources used for irrigating crops. That's one of the most common ways that a deadly fecal pathogen like *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7 can end up contaminating our spinach.

Produce farmers weren't required to test their irrigation water for pathogens like *E. coli* or *Salmonella.* But in 2011, after several high-profile disease outbreaks, Congress ordered a program requiring produce growers to begin testing their water under rules crafted by the Obama administration's Food and Drug Administration. The program was just about to go into effect when Trump's FDA, responding to pressure from the farm industry, delayed the water-testing rules for at least four more years. This decision was made six months ago.

On November 26th, the FDA announced that it had traced an *E. coli* outbreak in romaine lettuce back to growing regions in parts of central and northern California. A previous outbreak was traced back to Yuma farms in California, which were voluntarily testing their water for pathogens. Most of California's farmers are now testing for pathogens in their water sources. It's likely that the most recent contamination comes from a farm or farms that have been testing their water.

> *Villaneva and Gary Waugaman said the monthly testing is not foolproof; it minimizes, but doesn't eliminate, the risks. Also, pathogens from livestock and other animals can get into crops from wind, dust and other means." – Dirty Farm Water Is making Us Sick*

It appears that even when the water is clean, local animals may be picking up pathogens from animal farms and depositing them into the produce farms.

How To Avoid Food Poisoning

Smaller farms are usually a safer bet but by no means is this a guarantee against foodborne pathogens. We recommend getting to know your local farmers at your local farmer’s markets. Ask questions.

Take steps to avoid cross-contamination. This is likely to be one of the biggest reasons people get sick from food pathogens. For example, researchers at the University of Arizona found more fecal bacteria in household kitchens than they found swabbing the toilets. The bacteria was found in dish towels, rags, sponges, and on the sink drains and cutting boards.

Many of the experts are recommending that everyone be sure to cook all of their vegetables and herbs. This may increase safety but it ignores long-term health. We don’t have an easy answer for this issue. We advise, first and foremost, to stay healthy! A healthy gut has a wide array of bacteria that can make it very difficult for pathogens to take over. A healthy gut provides the entire body with beneficial bacteria that work as part of our immune system, which limits pathogenic activity throughout the entire body. Strong stomach acid makes it very hard for salmonella and many other pathogens to even get to the gut. You need a healthy digestive system to fend off pathogens. And the way one develops a robust, healthy digestive system is, in large part, by eating a lot of raw fresh vegetables and herbs. Therein lies the catch. It’s almost as is Big Pharma designed factory farms. That’s not the case, but it is too convenient that the government entities telling us how to eat are basically bought off by the drug companies while they make recommendations that don’t take our long-term health into consideration.

Related: *How To Heal Your Gut*

Supplements For Food Poisoning

I recommend 100% pure cranberry juice to have on hand at all times. For anything kidney related, real unadulterated cranberry juice is a godsend. Cranberry juice can help alleviate UTIs, cramping, and diarrhea.

My favorite antibacterial, antifungal, antiparasitic, and antiviral supplement is Berberine. Many studies show how potent this herb is, and there have even been a few studies regarding its efficacy on foodborne pathogens, and it looks promising. I have taken it, personally, when I had minor food poisoning and it seemed to get rid of it quickly. I took ten of the 500mg capsules. My friend, who also ate at the same restaurant and suffered the same gastroenteritis did not opt for the naturopathic approach and did not fare so well. But, I also had a healthier gut to begin with.

Other options, which should be in every natural-based medicine cabinet, include activated charcoal (I recommend this Intestinal Detox which has activated charcoal in it), oil of oregano, and a mushroom complex (the first one on that list is my favorite). It’s also a good idea to take a probiotic before and after eating at restaurants or anytime you could catch a foodborne pathogen. Activated charcoal is also used in hospitals for food poisoning. It will attach to toxins and allow your body to flush them out easily. oil of oregano and the mushroom complex are strong antimicrobials, though Berberine is even stronger. A probiotic can help digest food and make it much more difficult for pathogens to colonize.

Takeaways

The most important thing we can do is stay healthy (or get healthy), and vote with our wallets. Get to know your local farmer’s markets, get to know the farmers, and START GROWING YOUR OWN FOOD! If you don’t have any space for a garden, start

growing sprouts.

Sources:

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- *Chickens* – Farm Sanctuary
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