

WHY ARE WE SO IGNORANT ABOUT FOOD THESE DAYS?
(Paper prepared by Eva Lewis, Consumer Panel Member February 1997)

Home cooking has changed a lot in the last 10 years. The microwave has changed our habits enormously and we now have fan assisted ovens, both are very different to what we have all been used to before. This means change in both length of time and the way in which we prepare and cook food.

Many families no longer sit together at meal times. In some cases the members of a family may work at different times and each prepare a meal for themselves when they arrive home; often a ready meal to be heated up or small cuts of meat/chicken to be cooked quickly. With so many different appliances it can be quite complicated to work out which cooking time written on the packet is the right one for you, and does everyone remember that an uncooked chicken leg has the same worktop rules as a whole uncooked chicken.

Many handed down traditions from mother to child on the preparations of food seem to be getting lost and the basic rules on food preparation, cross contamination, storage and refrigeration at the right temperatures and methods of cooking seem to be getting confused in many areas,

For example - at the January 1997 Consumer Panel meeting, the then Parliamentary Secretary Angela Browning kindly explained to me that unless all the meat is cooked in a burger it could be susceptible to E Coli whereas a steak cooked rare is safe; but does the ordinary consumer know that if you take the same steak and mince it, unless all the mince is cooked it could be unsafe. Many ordinary consumers like myself, think the problem with burgers is that minced beef is to be treated with caution but minced steak is perfectly safe, i.e. as with the enclosed newspaper cutting. I understand this but what about everybody else.

Because I have a young child I regularly eat in American type restaurants that have lots of fun food i.e. Sticky Fingers, Tootsies, T.G.I.F, The Big Easy, Maxwell's and others. All these restaurants serve burgers cooked to your taste. They all ask you how you would like your burger cooked and if you say 'medium to rare' they say "fine". There is no mention that maybe it would be safer to have your burger cooked a little more.

What do we do about it?

Could MAFF do more to promote these everyday issues in our kitchens?

Are the Foodsense booklets being researched to find out how many people do actually read them?

Could MAFF maybe have a slot in some of the cookery shows on television with maybe a carton character saying things like “Don’t forget to clean your worktop before we go onto the vegetables” etc.

Could restaurants be encouraged to cook all burgers thoroughly as Mcdonalds have been encouraged to by the Minister.

Distributed by:
MAFF Consumer Panel Secretariat
Room 303a, Ergon House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
Tel.: 0171 238 5957
Fax.: 0171 238 6330

Newspaper Cutting

It was Adolph Hitler who said that “no one who has visited an abattoir could ever eat meat again”.

Not a hamburger, anyway, which comes mainly from what they scrape off the floor at the end of the day.