

For SNA Members

"It was Something I Ate, Doctor . . ."

By

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Good food and well-being are closely connected elements in the pattern of human life, and whenever we are having a meal, whether it is just plain food to satisfy our daily needs or a display of the fine art of cooking to celebrate some special occasion, the food is likely to make us feel good and to produce a happy mood—with no room at all for unpleasant considerations of food risks.

But the dangers which may attend us at the table are very real, and a matter of concern to health authorities all over the world.

And more than that, it's a matter of common human interest, because food is an inevitable part of our daily life.

Do not think that food-borne disease is an evil which is found only in certain parts of the world. The problem is a universal one existing all over the inhabited globe.

Food-borne diseases take their toll among the people of arctic Greenland as well as among the inhabitants of tropical Asia, Africa and America. Outbreaks occur in the smallest villages of rural districts as well as in the world capitals.

Food-borne diseases are numerous and their mode of appearance presents a very varied picture. However, the main facts can be listed in a rather simple way.

1. Infections carried by Food.

Food may act as a carrier of agents of infectious and parasitic diseases. *In that case the disease-producing germs (bacteria, virus) or the parasites have in some way been introduced into the food from diseased animals or humans.* The reproduction of disease then depends upon the ability of the disease-producing organisms to invade the digestive tract of

those who eat the contaminated food. In some types of food-borne infections, the offending bacteria must have been given a chance to multiply in the food. This happens when the food is not eaten soon after cooking or is not kept at a low enough temperature to prevent bacterial growth.

The nature of disease outbreaks following the transmission of disease germs through food appears from a few recent examples: in 1947 there was an outbreak of trichinosis with 300 cases and 33 deaths among the Eskimos of Disco Bay (Greenland). *Cause: The flesh of a walrus harbouring the microscopic infective larvae of the Trichina worm had been eaten in a raw or insufficiently cooked state.*

2. Food poisoning.

A quite different type of food-borne disease is known under the common name of food poisoning. Food poisoning is an acute attack of gastro-intestinal disorder, which may develop within a few hours after the dangerous meal.

The symptoms include nausea, vomiting, gastric pains and diarrhoea and although they may be severe the patients usually recover within one or two days and fatal cases are rare.

This well-known type of food poisoning is caused by bacterial toxins, poisonous compounds produced when certain types of bacteria already present in foods or introduced into them by food handlers have been allowed to multiply excessively.

This type of food poisoning is a common problem all over the world, and especially in connection with public restaurants, canteens, military camps and similar institutions where large quantities

of food are prepared and kept ready for serving over a period which may allow time for the multiplication of toxin-producing bacteria.

This short description sufficiently demonstrates some of the factors responsible for the development of *food-borne infections* on the one hand, and *food poisoning* on the other :

1. The use of diseased animals for human food.
2. The contamination of food, directly or indirectly, by human or animal sources of infection.
3. Inadequate cooking of possibly contaminated food.
4. Storage of perishable foods under unsuitable conditions.
5. The consumption of food, unhygienically grown or handled, in a raw state.

3. Prevention.

These are the findings upon which to build up a logical system of prevention. The first part of this system is an efficient food control service to exclude from human consumption foods originating from diseased animals, and to carry out a sanitary supervision of the production, manufacture and marketing of foods in

order to protect them against dangerous contamination and to secure clean and safe handling.

The second part of the preventive system should be established by using health education programmes to make the people understand and apply to daily practices a few basic rules of food hygiene. These, of course, should be adopted to local conditions and circumstances, but the broad outline is as follows :

Heat is the best means of destroying the germs of infectious disease in foods ; cooling and freezing has no such effect, except in very special cases. Whenever feasible, foods should therefore be thoroughly cooked or reheated.

Special precautions should be applied to raw foods when there has been any risk of contamination.

Water from a possibly unsafe source should be boiled.

To escape the risk of food poisoning, ready-cooked food, if not served immediately, must either be kept very hot, or else cooled rapidly and kept cold. The temperature should be either below 10°C (50°F) or above 50°C (122°F), and the lukewarm intermediate temperatures which promote the growth of bacteria should be avoided.

SNA Secretary's Tentative Itinerary

SOUTH INDIA

	Arrive	Depart		Arrive	Depart
Hyderabad	April 1	April 2	Tiruppattur	20	20
Medak	3	3	Trivandrum	21	23
Karim Nagar	4	4	Neyyoor	23	23
Hanuma Konda	5	5	Nagercoil	24	24
Secunderabad	5	6	Ernakulam	25	26
Bangalore	7	9	Mangalore	27	28
Chikballapur	9	10	Coimbatore	28	29
Kolar	10	11	Erode	29	30
Mysore	12	13	Nellore	May 1	May 2
Mercara	13	14	I shall be happy to meet members of SNA/TNAI, HVL and M.A. at meetings convened in the above places.		
Vijayapet	14	15			
Tanjore	17	18			
Madurai	18	20			

I. DORABJI