

POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

Home canning: Poison in a jar?



Home canning is coming back into fashion, perhaps partly due to economic issues. Urban women between 39 and 55 have started canning without the benefit of having grown up learning the skill from older, experienced relatives. We recommend taking a class from a qualified source before you try canning. Here are some safety concerns to know as you begin preserving your own food.

Be aware of the dangers of **botulism**. Experienced home canners know that the "bad bug" to avoid is *Clostridium botulinum*, the organism responsible for botulism, and the second most common cause of food poisoning in the United States. Symptoms of botulism poisoning usually show up between 18 to 36 hours after the person has been exposed and include weakness, double vision and difficulty swallowing and speaking. Like all food poisoning, it's likely to be more dangerous for infants, the elderly or people with weakened immune systems.

The good news? Botulism requires a very unusual and specific environment to thrive, so by following a few basic safety tips, you can minimize your risk. Seek out information on safe canning such as www.homecanning.org, www.foodsafety.gov or the USDA's Complete Guide to Home Canning. You can also contact your local Agricultural Extension for classes or local resources.

The American Association of Poison Control Centers offers the following tips on safely preserving food:

- Select produce carefully, and wash it thoroughly before canning.
- Home canning requires specialized equipment. Do not use pots, pans and jars that are intended for other purposes.
- Use the **most current guidelines**. Recommendations for safe canning may have changed, especially if the cookbook you are using is old or handed down from family members.
- Don't assume that heat alone will eliminate the threat of botulism. Make sure you are diligent about following canning directions.
- For further tips on safely storing and preparing food, call the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854.

If you suspect you have been poisoned by contaminated food of any kind, call your local poison center at 1-800-222-1222 to speak with a poison specialist. They can help you determine if you are in immediate danger, or whether you can care for yourself at home. Some symptoms, such as a fever or blood in the vomit or stool, indicate a medical emergency and should not be ignored.