

TikTok Avocado Trend Health Concerns

Since the inception of the popular social media app TikTok, countless “life hack” videos have gone viral – some of which have prompted health concerns. The latest viral TikTok trend is a tip for keeping avocados “fresh” by submerging them in water and storing them in the refrigerator until you are ready to consume them. Some individuals have even stored their leftover avocado this way – slicing the avocado in half and saving the rest for later.

In May, the social media challenge prompted the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to release a warning about the health risks associated with it.

Rachel Gustafson, Family Medicine APRN, OSF HealthCare

“It gives bacteria a chance to harbor and multiply overnight, or even over months like some people are doing. It increases your risk for those GI infections such as listeria, salmonella, etcetera.” (:15)

The FDA says storing avocados this way may even cause pathogens on the surface to multiply during the time it is submerged in the water, adding that even disinfecting the avocado skin prior to slicing would not remove the contamination as it may have already infiltrated the skin.

Avocados are popular for many food dishes or even for just spreading on a slice of toast in the morning. Avocados typically have a short shelf life – the fruit tends to ripen quickly – and will rapidly turn a brown color after they are cut into. Individuals who have attempted this trend on TikTok have claimed it works wonders because it keeps the avocado that perfect shade of green.

While these avocados may look ripe and fresh on the outside due to their bright green color, the fact that they were stored in water means there is a good chance they are not as fresh as they appear. In fact, although it may not look as appealing as a bright green avocado, health experts add that the browning of an avocado is perfectly natural – and consuming a browned avocado is, in many cases, much safer than consuming a green avocado that has spent any amount of time being stored in a container of water.

Rachel Gustafson, Family Medicine APRN, OSF HealthCare

“Think about an avocado like you would an apple. A sliced apple will turn brown if you leave it out for even just an hour or so. That is just because of the oxidative process. The oxygen hits the apple, making it a little bit discolored. The same thing happens with an avocado. That does not mean that it’s old, it just has changed colors because of being sliced in half and open to the air.” (:25)

Some people may wonder if it is safe to consume an avocado that has been submerged in water for a day or two as opposed to weeks at a time. Gustafson recommends avoiding this type of storage altogether regardless of time.

Rachel Gustafson, Family Medicine APRN, OSF HealthCare

“It probably gives it more of a chance for the bacteria to multiply when it is kept in the refrigerator for months at a time rather than one overnight. But even if after one day if the avocado gets that brown to it, it’s still good and ripe, so I probably would not take the chance and just use your avocado the next day as is.” (:21)

Gustafson adds that the best way to store an avocado would be on the counter if it is not yet opened, and then keep it in a sealed container in the refrigerator once it has been sliced open – just make sure to avoid adding water. Once properly stored, the best time to finish your avocado is within two to three days.

If you are concerned you may have consumed an avocado that was not stored properly, pay attention to signs of a possible listeria or salmonella infection. Symptoms of these infections can include stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and headaches.

Rachel Gustafson, Family Medicine APRN, OSF HealthCare

“A lot of times, we will tell people to give it a day or two. With these salmonella and listeria infections, a lot of them will just get better on their own. The times that you want to investigate it further is if you are having symptoms such as significant amounts of diarrhea, you are not able to keep water down, and you’re getting dehydrated.” (:20)

If you are feeling ill and it continues for more than a couple days with worsening symptoms, Gustafson recommends seeking medical attention from your primary care provider or local emergency room. In some cases, antibiotics are needed.

Most importantly, keep food safety in mind when storing your fresh produce.