

## Pay Attention to Food Freshness

A recent experience with street food taught me a valuable lesson about the importance of food freshness. While enjoying Xinjiang barbecue from a vendor, I ordered two lamb shashlik skewers and a portion of ham. The next day, I found myself dealing with an unfortunate case of diarrhea.

Upon reflection, I realized the culprit was likely the ham. Though it had been refrigerated at the vendor's stall, there was no way to know how long it had been sitting there or how many times it had been taken in and out of refrigeration. In contrast, the lamb shashlik was clearly fresh, as it was the vendor's signature dish with high turnover.

During my later visits to various barbecue stands, I stuck to ordering only lamb shashlik, but then I realized this was too limiting. The real lesson wasn't about avoiding certain foods entirely, but rather about making smart choices based on freshness. Whether it's lamb, chicken, or beef, any dish can be a good choice as long as the ingredients are fresh and properly handled. The good news is that I never again encountered diarrhea after becoming more mindful about food freshness.

This experience taught me that food safety isn't just about being cautious when eating out—it's about being mindful of food freshness everywhere, including at home. Even in our own kitchens, we sometimes keep food in the refrigerator for too long, which can lead to similar problems. A refrigerator isn't a magical device that preserves food indefinitely—it merely slows down the spoilage process.

Remember: The best way to prevent food-related illness is to be mindful of what you're eating and how long it's been stored, regardless of where you're dining.