

Double Dipping

- 1 What do you do when you are left with half a chip in your hand after dipping? Admit it, you've wondered whether it's OK to double dip the chip, loading your half-eaten chip with a bit more dip. But can the bacteria in your mouth make it onto the chip then into the dip? Presumably some of your mouth's bacteria transfer to a food when you take a bite. But the question is whether that happens, and if so, how many bacteria make it from mouth to dip. We compared bitten versus unbitten crackers, measuring how many bacteria could transfer from the cracker to a cup of water. We found about 1,000 more bacteria per milliliter of water when crackers were bitten before dipping than solutions where unbitten crackers were dipped.
- 2 Then we compared three kinds of dip: salsa, chocolate and cheese dips. Again, we tested bacterial populations in the dips after already-bitten crackers were dipped, and after dipping with unbitten crackers. We also tested the dips two hours after dipping to see how bacterial populations were growing. So, how dirty is your dip? We found that without double-dipping, our foods had no detectable bacteria present. Once subjected to double-dipping, the salsa took on about five times more bacteria from the bitten chip when compared to chocolate and cheese dips. 15 two hours after double-dipping, the salsa bacterial numbers dropped to about the same levels as the chocolate and cheese.
- 3 So, is it something you need to worry about? Anywhere from hundreds to thousands of different bacterial types and viruses live in the human oral cavity, most of which are harmless. But some aren't so good. With that in mind, there may be a concern over the spread of oral bacteria from person to person thanks to double-dipping. And a person doesn't have to be sick to pass on germs. If you detect double-dippers in the midst of a festive gathering, you might want to steer clear of their favored snack. And if you yourself are sick, do the rest of us a favor and don't double-dip.

www.scientificamerican.com, 2015