

A Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling

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Never had food poisoning? Actually, it's called foodborne illness. Perhaps you have, but thought you were sick with the flu. Some 33 million Americans will suffer from foodborne illness this year.

Why? Because at the right temperature, bacteria you can't see, smell or taste can make you sick.

It doesn't have to happen, though. Many cases could be avoided if people just handled food properly. So here's what to do...

When You Go Shopping Buy cold food last, get it home fast.



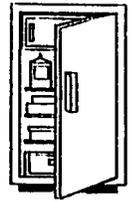
Shopping

- When you're out, grocery shop last. Take food straight home to the refrigerator. **Never leave food in a hot car!**

- Don't buy anything you won't use before the use-by date.
- **Don't buy food in poor condition.** Make sure refrigerated food is cold to the touch. Frozen food should be rock-solid. Canned goods should be free of dents, cracks or bulging lids which can indicate a **serious** food poisoning threat.

When You Store Food Keep it safe, refrigerate.

Check the temperature of your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer. You can buy one of these at most stores that sell housewares. To keep bacteria in check, the refrigerator should run at 40°F, the freezer unit at 0°F. Keep your refrigerator as cold as possible without freezing your milk or lettuce.

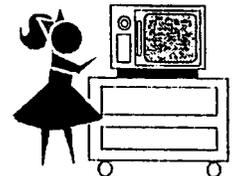


Home Storage

- Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish immediately if you can't use it within a few days.
- Put packages of raw meat, poultry or fish on a plate before refrigerating so their juices won't drip on other food. Raw juices often contain bacteria.

When You Prepare Food Keep everything clean. Thaw in refrigerator.

- Wash hands in hot soapy water before preparing food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.



Preparation

- Harmful bacteria multiply quickly in kitchen towels, sponges and cloths. Wash cloth items often in

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Cold Storage

These SHORT but safe time limits will help keep refrigerated food from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. These time limits will keep frozen food at top quality.

Product	Refrigerator (40°F)	Freezer (0°F)
Eggs Fresh, in shell Raw yolks, whites Hardcooked Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, opened unopened	3 weeks 2-4 days 1 week 3 days 10 days	Don't freeze 1 year Don't freeze well Don't freeze 1 year
Mayonnaise , commercial Refrigerate after opening	2 months	Don't freeze
TV Dinners, Frozen Casseroles Keep frozen until ready to serve		3-4 months
Deli and Vacuum-Packed Products Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads Pre-stuffed pork and lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed with dressing Store-cooked convenience meals Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal	3-5 days 1 day 1-2 days 2 weeks, unopened	These products don't freeze well
Soups and Stews Vegetable or meat-added	3-4 days	2-3 months
Hamburger, Ground and Stew Meats Hamburger and stew meats Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb and mixtures of them	1-2 days 1-2 days	3-4 months 3-4 months
Hotdogs and Lunch Meats Hotdogs, opened package unopened package Lunch meats, opened unopened	1 week 2 weeks 3-5 days 2 weeks	In freezer wrap, 1-2 months
Bacon and Sausage Bacon Sausage, raw from pork, beef, turkey Smoked breakfast links, patties Hard sausage-pepperoni, jerky sticks	7 days 1-2 days 7 days 2-3 weeks	1 month 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months
Ham, Corned Beef Corned beef in pouch with pickling juices Ham, canned, label says keep refrigerated Ham, fully cooked-whole Ham, fully cooked-half Ham, fully cooked-slices	5-7 days 6-9 months 7 days 3-5 days 3-4 days	Drained, wrapped, 1 month Don't freeze 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months
Fresh Meat Steaks, beef Chops, pork Chops, lamb Roasts, beef Roasts, lamb Roasts, pork and veal Variety meats -Tongue, brain, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings	3-5 days 3-5 days 3-5 days 3-5 days 3-5 days 3-5 days 1-2 days	6-12 months 4-6 months 6-9 months 6-12 months 6-9 months 4-6 months 3-4 months
Meat Leftovers Cooked meat and meat dishes Gravy and meat broth	3-4 days 1-2 days	2-3 months 2-3 months
Fresh Poultry Chicken or turkey, whole Chicken or turkey pieces Giblets	1-2 days 1-2 days 1-2 days	1 year 9 months 3-4 months
Cooked Poultry, Leftover Fried chicken Cooked poultry dishes Pieces, plain Pieces, covered with broth, gravy Chicken nuggets, patties	3-4 days 3-4 days 3-4 days 1-2 days 1-2 days	4 months 4-6 months 4 months 6 months 1-3 months

the hot-cycle in your machine. Consider using paper towels to clean up meat and poultry juices. Avoid sponges or place them in the dishwasher daily to kill bacteria.

- Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food. For instance, wash your hands, cutting board, knife and countertop in hot soapy water after cutting up the chicken and before slicing salad ingredients. Also use hot soapy water to wash sink and faucet handles the raw meat or your "meat-covered" hands have touched.
- Use plastic cutting boards rather than wooden ones. Wash cutting boards thoroughly after use.
- **What about antibacterial sanitizers in the kitchen?** Food handling experts feel hot soapy water used properly should protect you adequately against foodborne bacteria. However, kitchen sanitizers (including a mixture of bleach and water) can provide some added protection. NOTE: Sanitizer product directions must be followed carefully as products differ greatly.
- Thaw food in the microwave or refrigerator, NOT on the kitchen counter. Marinate in the refrigerator, too.

When You're Cooking

Cook thoroughly.

It takes thorough cooking to kill harmful bacteria, so you're taking chances when you eat meat, poultry, fish or eggs that are raw or only partly cooked. Plus, hamburger that is red in the middle, rare and medium-rare steak and roast beef are also undercooked from the safety standpoint.

- Cook red meat to 160°F. Cook poultry to 180°F. Use a meat thermometer to check that it's cooked all the way through.
- To check visually, red meat is done when it's brown or grey inside; poultry when juices run clear; fish when it flakes with a fork.
- Ground meat, where bacteria can spread throughout the meat during processing, should be cooked to at least 160°F. This means there is no pink left in the middle or in juices. You can allow large cuts like roasts to stay slightly pink in the center as long as they've reached at least 145°F (medium-rare). Do not serve any cut at this low temperature if you have scored (cut or poked with a fork) or tenderized it before cooking, thus forcing surface bacteria into the center.

- Salmonella, a bacteria that causes food poisoning, can grow inside fresh, unbroken eggs. So cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm, not runny. Scramble eggs to a firm texture. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or only partially cooked.

Cooking Temperatures	
Product	Fahrenheit
Eggs and Egg Dishes Eggs Egg dishes	Cook until yolk and white are firm 160
Ground Meat and Meat Mixtures Turkey, chicken Veal, beef, lamb, pork	165 160
Fresh Beef Medium-Rare Medium Well Done	145 160 170
Fresh Veal Medium Well Done	160 170
Fresh Lamb Medium Well Done	160 170
Fresh Pork Medium Well Done	160 170
Poultry Chicken, whole Turkey, whole Poultry breasts, roasts Poultry thighs, wings Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird) Duck and Goose	180 180 170 Cook until juices run clear 165 180
Ham Fresh (raw) Pre-cooked (to reheat)	160 140

When You're Microwaving

Do it safely.

A great timesaver, the microwave has one food safety disadvantage. It sometimes leaves cold spots in food. Bacteria can survive in these spots. So . . .

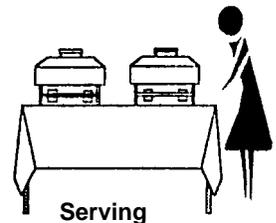
- Cover food with a lid or plastic wrap so steam can aid thorough cooking. Vent wrap and make sure it doesn't touch the food.
- Stir and rotate your food for even cooking. No turntable? Rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.

- Observe the standing time called for in a recipe or package directions. During the standing time, food finishes cooking.
- Use the oven temperature probe or a meat thermometer to check that food is done. Insert it at several spots.

When You Serve Food

Never leave it out over 2 hours.

- Use clean dishes and utensils to serve food, not those used in preparation. Serve grilled food on a clean plate too, not one that held raw meat, poultry or fish.



- **Never leave perishable food out of the refrigerator over 2 hours!** Bacteria that can cause food poisoning grow quickly at warm temperatures.
- Pack lunches in insulated carriers with a cold pack. Caution children never to leave lunches in direct sun or on a warm radiator.
- Carry picnic food in a cooler with a cold pack. When possible, put the cooler in the shade. Keep the lid on as much as you can.
- Party time? Keep cold party food on ice or serve it throughout the gathering from platters from the refrigerator.

Likewise, divide hot party food into smaller serving platters. Keep platters refrigerated until time to warm them up for serving.

When You Handle Leftovers

Use small containers for quick cooling.

- Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. Don't pack the refrigerator – cool air must circulate to keep food safe.
- With poultry or other stuffed meats, remove stuffing and refrigerate it in separate containers.

Reheating

- Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to 165°F.
- Microwave leftovers using a lid or vented plastic wrap for thorough heating.

When in Doubt, Throw It Out

Sometimes foods get forgotten in the refrigerator and may be kept too long.

- **Danger – never taste food that looks or smells strange** to see if you can still use. Just discard it.

- Is it **moldy**? The mold you see is only the tip of the iceberg. The poisons molds can form are found **under** the surface of the food. So, while you can sometimes save hard cheese and salami and firm fruits and vegetables by cutting the mold out – remove a large area around it – most moldy food should be discarded.



Power's Out

Your Freezer

Without power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about two days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen one day.

If power will be coming back on fairly soon, you can make the food last longer by keeping the door shut as much as possible.

If power will be off for an extended period, take food to friends' freezers, locate a commercial freezer or use dry ice.

Your Refrigerator-Freezer Combination

Without power, the refrigerator section will keep food cool four to six hours depending on the kitchen temperature.

A full, well-functioning freezer unit should keep food frozen for two days. A half-full freezer unit should keep things frozen about one day.

Block ice can keep food on the refrigerator shelves cooler. Dry ice can be added to the freezer unit. You can't touch dry ice and you shouldn't breathe the fumes, so follow handling directions carefully.

Thawed Food?

Food still containing ice crystals or that **feels** refrigerator-cold can be refrozen.

Discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there two hours or more. Immediately discard anything with a strange color or odor.

Is It Food Poisoning?

If you or a family member develop nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps, you could have food poisoning. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to tell since, depending on the illness, symptoms can appear anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 weeks after eating bad food. Most often, though, people get sick within 4 to 48 hours after eating.

In more serious cases, food poisoning victims may have nervous system problems like paralysis, double vision or trouble swallowing or breathing.

If symptoms are severe or the victim is very young, old, pregnant or already ill, call a doctor or go to the hospital right away.

When to Report Foodborne Illness

You or your physician should report serious cases of foodborne illness to the local health department.

Report any food poisoning incidents if the food involved came from a restaurant or commercial outlet.

Give a detailed, but short, account of the incident. If the food is a commercial product, have it in hand so you can describe it over the phone.

If you're asked to keep the food refrigerated so officials can examine it later, follow directions carefully.

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