



Food Poisoning and Safe Food Handling

You can prevent most cases of food poisoning by being careful when preparing and storing food. Wash your hands and working surfaces while preparing food, cook foods to safe temperatures, and refrigerate foods promptly. Be especially careful when cooking or heating perishable foods, such as eggs, meats, poultry, fish, shellfish, milk, and milk products. You should also take extra care if you are pregnant, have an impaired immune system, or are preparing foods for children or older people.

The following steps can help prevent food poisoning (adapted from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

- **Shop safely.** Bag raw meat, poultry, and fish separately from other food items. Drive home immediately after finishing your shopping so you can store all foods promptly.
- **Prepare foods safely.** Wash your hands before and after handling food. Also wash them after using the bathroom or changing diapers. Wash fresh fruits and vegetables, rinsing well with running water. After cutting raw meat, poultry, or fish, wash your cutting board with hot, soapy water and disinfect it with a bleach solution. Use 1 teaspoon of bleach per 1 quart [32 fl oz] of water, or according to the label directions. You can also wash your knives and cutting boards in the dishwasher to disinfect them.
- **Store foods safely.** Cook, refrigerate, or freeze meat, poultry, eggs, fish, and ready-to-eat foods within 2 hours. Make sure your refrigerator is set at 40 F or colder.
- **Cook foods safely.** Use a clean meat thermometer to determine whether foods are cooked to a safe temperature. Reheat leftovers to at least 165 F. Do not eat undercooked hamburger, and be aware of the risk of food poisoning from raw fish (including sushi), clams, and oysters.
- **Serve foods safely.** Keep cooked hot foods hot [140 F or above] and cold foods cold [40 F or below].
- **Follow labels on food packaging.** Food packaging labels provide information about when to use the food and how to store it. Reading food labels and following safety instructions will reduce your chances of becoming ill with food poisoning.
- **When in doubt, throw it out.** If you are not sure whether a food is safe, don't eat it. Reheating food that is contaminated will not make it safe. Don't taste suspicious food. It may smell and look fine but still may not be safe to eat.

It is important to pay particular attention to food preparation and storage during warm months when food is often served outside. Bacteria grow faster in warmer weather, so food can spoil more quickly and possibly cause illness. Do not leave food outdoors for more than 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 F, and never leave it outdoors for more than 2 hours.

**If you would like more information, please contact
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