

1
Wash hands
often

1
Keep raw meats
and ready-to-eat
foods separate

2
Cook to proper
temperatures

2
Refrigerate
foods promptly
below 40°F

3
Learn how
to calibrate
your food
thermometer

Taking control of home food safety

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24-hour bug? Or something you ate? Very often what seems like the flu may be food-borne illness, commonly called food poisoning. Unfortunately, mishandling of food at home is a leading cause of food-borne illness. The American Dietetic Association and the Con-Agra Foundation suggest four simple actions to take control of food safety in your kitchen. In the following pages are some tips to guide you through the world of home food safety.

- Wash hands often.
- Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate.
- Cook foods to the proper temperature.
- Refrigerate promptly below 40°F.



Wash hands often

Proper hand washing may eliminate nearly half of all cases of food-borne illness and significantly reduce the spread of the common cold and flu.

When you wash

- Hands should be washed in warm, soapy water before preparing foods and after handling raw meat, poultry and seafood.
- Always wash your hands front and back up to your wrists, between fingers and under fingernails.
- Never forget to wash your hands after switching tasks, such as handling raw meat and then cutting vegetables.

- Dry hands with disposable paper towels, clean cloth towels or air dry.
- Sing two choruses of “Happy Birthday” while you lather up—cleaning your hands for 20 seconds.

Wash your hands more often before you ...

- Handle or prepare food
- Eat meals
- Feed children

Wash your hands more often after you ...

- Prepare food
- Touch raw food, especially meats
- Switch food preparation tasks
- Touch eggs and egg-rich foods
- Use the restroom
- Change a diaper
- Cough or sneeze
- Handle garbage, dirty dishes
- Smoke a cigarette
- Pet animals
- Use the phone
- Touch face, hair, body, other people
- Touch a cut or sore
- Clean or touch dirty laundry

And don't forget surfaces ...

- Keep kitchen surfaces such as appliances, countertops, cutting boards and utensils clean with hot, soapy water.
- A smelly dishcloth, towel or sponge is a sure sign that unsafe bacterial growth is lurking nearby. Bacteria live and grow in damp conditions.
 - » Wash dishcloths and towels often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
 - » Disinfect sponges in a chlorine bleach solution.
 - » Replace worn sponges frequently.

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Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate

Be careful with cutting boards. When juices from raw meats or germs from unclean objects accidentally touch cooked or ready-to-eat foods (such as fruits or salads), cross-contamination occurs. If not cleaned correctly, the board harbors harmful bacteria.

Acrylic, glass, marble, plastic or solid wood? You choose. Just follow these guidelines:

- Use two cutting boards: one strictly to cut raw meat, poultry and seafood; the other for ready-to-eat foods, like breads and vegetables. Don't confuse them.
- Wash boards thoroughly in hot, soapy water after each use or place in dishwasher. *[Wood boards washed often in dishwashers may crack and split.]*
- Discard old cutting boards that have cracks, crevices and excessive knife scars.

Reminders to prevent cross-contamination:

- Wash plates between uses or use separate plates: one for holding raw meat, poultry and seafood; another for cooked foods.
- Store raw meats, poultry and seafood on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator so juices don't drip onto other foods.
- Place washed produce into clean storage containers, not back into the original ones.
- Use one utensil to taste and another to stir or mix food.
- Make sure you use clean scissors or blades to open bags of food.
- Wear latex gloves if you have a sore or cut on your hand.

Special precaution:

After cutting raw meats on your board, first clean thoroughly with hot soapy water, then disinfect with chlorine bleach or other sanitizing solution, and last rinse with clean water.



Cook to proper temperatures

Harmful bacteria are destroyed when food is cooked to proper temperatures. Buy a meat thermometer and use it! This is the only reliable way to ensure safety and to determine the doneness of cooked foods.

How to get an accurate thermometer reading:

- **Red meats, roasts, steaks, chops and poultry pieces:** insert in center of the thickest part, away from bone, fat and gristle.
- **Poultry (whole bird):** insert in inner thigh area near the breast, but not touching bone.
- **Ground meat and poultry:** place in the thickest area of meatloaf or patty; with thin patties, insert sideways reaching the very center with the stem.
- **Egg dishes and casseroles:** insert in center or thickest area of the dish.
- **Fish:** cook until opaque and flakes easily with a fork.

Important tip:

Always remember to wash the thermometer stem thoroughly in hot, soapy water after each use!

safe cooking temperatures

FOOD ITEM	INTERNAL TEMPERATURE
Beef, Lamb, Veal (ground products)	
Hamburger (patties, meatballs, etc.)	160°F
Beef, Lamb, Veal (non-ground products)	
Roasts/steaks, medium-rare	145°F
Roasts/steaks, medium	160°F
Roasts/steaks, well-done	170°F
Poultry	
Ground chicken, turkey	165°F
Whole chicken, turkey	180°F
Boneless turkey roasts	170°F
Poultry breast and roast	170°F
Poultry thighs, wings & drumstick	180°F
Duck, goose	180°F
Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)	165°F
Pork (all cuts and ground)	
Medium	160°F
Well-done	170°F
Fresh, raw ham	160°F
Fully cooked ham, to reheat	140°F
Egg dishes, casseroles	160°F
Leftovers, reheated	165°F



Refrigerate foods promptly below 40°F. Refrigerate foods quickly and at a proper temperature to slow the growth of bacteria and prevent food-borne illness. Leftover foods from a meal should not stay out of refrigeration longer than two hours. In hot weather (90°F or above), this time is reduced to one hour.

Also, make sure your refrigerator is set below 40°F. This will keep perishable foods out of what's called the *danger zone*—40°F or above. Keep a refrigerator thermometer inside your refrigerator at all times!

general guidelines for leftovers

PERISHABLE FOOD	KEEPS UP TO
Cooked fresh vegetables	3–4 days
Cooked pasta	3–5 days
Cooked rice	1 week
Deli counter meats	5 days
Meat:	
Ham, cooked and sliced	3–4 days
Hot dogs, opened	1 week
Lunch meats, prepackaged, opened	3–5 days
Cooked beef, pork, poultry, fish and meat casseroles	3–4 days
Cooked patties and nuggets, gravy and broth	1–2 days
Seafood, cooked	2 days
Soups and stews	3–4 days
Stuffing	1–2 days

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

Learn how to calibrate your food thermometer

There are two simple methods to check the accuracy of a food thermometer. However, not all thermometers can be calibrated—so make sure to check the manufacturer's instructions. Thermometers that can be calibrated usually contain a nut under the dial that can be adjusted with small pliers or a wrench.

Boiling water method

Materials needed: one deep pot and water

In a deep pot, bring water to a rolling boil. Dip the thermometer stem two inches into the boiling water without touching the bottom. Wait for 30 seconds and the thermometer should read 212°F (100°C). [... at sea level. But, for example, at 5,000 feet, it should read 202°F.] If it doesn't, adjust the

temperature by turning the calibration nut underneath the head of the thermometer according to the manufacturer's directions.

Ice water method

Materials needed: large glass, crushed ice, clean water

Fill the large glass with crushed ice. Add clean water until the glass is full. Stir the mixture well. Put the thermometer stem into the ice water so the sensing area is submerged. Wait 30 seconds, or until the indicator stops moving. Do not let the stem or probe touch the container's bottom or sides. If the thermometer does not read 32°F, hold the calibration nut securely with a small wrench or other tool and rotate the head until it reads 32°F (0°C).

take a food safety quiz!

1. Hands should be rinsed in water for at least five seconds before preparing foods and after handling raw meats.
A. True. B. False.
2. One way to prevent cross-contamination is to use 2 cutting boards, one strictly for raw meats, poultry and seafood and another for ready-to-eat foods.
A. True. B. False.
3. After cutting meat on a cutting board, the best way to clean a cutting board is to ...
A. Wipe off with a clean sponge.
B. Wash in hot water with soap.
C. Wash in hot water with soap, then sanitize the board in chlorine bleach solution and then lastly rinse with clean water.
D. All of the above are acceptable.
4. A meat/cooking thermometer is the only reliable way to check the doneness of meats, poultry, egg dishes and leftovers.
A. True. B. False.
5. Leftover foods should be reheated to ...
A. 140° F.
B. 150° F.
C. 165° F.
D. Doesn't matter.
6. Meat, fish and poultry should be defrosted ...
A. On the counter.
B. In the refrigerator.
C. In the microwave.
D. In the refrigerator, or in the microwave.
7. The proper temperature for a home refrigerator should be below 40°F.
A. True. B. False.
8. As a rule of thumb, leftover foods should not stay out of refrigeration for more than ____ hours. In hot weather (80°F or warmer), this time is reduced to ____ hour(s).
A. four, three
B. three, one
C. three, two
D. two, one
9. Four simple actions were suggested to take control of food safety in your kitchen. Which tip is most important?
A. Wash hands often.
B. Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate.
C. Cook to proper temperatures.
D. Refrigerate promptly below 40°F.
E. All of the above.

Answers to the Food Safety Quiz: 1. B; 2. A; 3. C; 4. A; 5. C; 6. B; 7. A; 8. D; 9. E

a note about this publication

This publication is reprinted here from another source (American Dietetic Association and ConAgra Foundation). We do not always have the resources at Project Inform to produce our own treatment information on every treatment topic. In these cases, we try to provide reliable information from other sources but cannot confirm that every fact in these publications is accurate. This information is designed to support, not replace, the relationship that exists between you and your doctor or medical provider.

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