



Prevent Food Poisoning: A Consumer Guide

An English translation of a Spanish publication of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University, entitled "Prevenga la Enfermedad Alimenticia: Una Guía Para el Consumidor ." Translated by permission.

The safe handling of food in the grocery store and at the table can reduce the risk of sickness caused by spoiled food. It is important to buy, store and serve foods according to these basic rules for the safe handling of food.

Keep everything that comes into contact with food clean.

Cook food completely in order to kill the bacteria that cause food poisoning.

Refrigerate perishables at 40 degrees F or below.

Do not contaminate cooked food with bacteria from raw food.

Follow these rules daily when handling food.

Safety When Shopping

Plan your grocery shopping. Buy perishables -- meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products -- last. Make grocery shopping your last stop before returning home in order to refrigerate or freeze perishables. Do this within one hour when possible.

Choose refrigerated or frozen products that are in the proper display cases and whose packaging is in good condition, without scratches or tears.

Keep raw meat and poultry separated from

other foods, especially food that will be eaten without further cooking. Use plastic bags for vegetables and greens in order to keep them from getting contaminated. Putting raw meat in plastic bags keeps the juices separated from other foods. Follow the "use by," "sell by" and pull by" dates.

Safe Storage

Keep the temperature in the refrigerator below 40 degrees F and temperatures in the freezer at 0 degrees F or below. Use an appliance thermometer to confirm the temperatures.

In order to avoid contamination, keep the refrigerator clean. Spills encourage decay and the growth of bacteria.

Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood and their juices away from other food, especially those that will not be cooked further. Wrap them or put them in plastic bags and place them on a plate on the lowest shelf in the refrigerator to keep the juices from dripping on other foods.

Store packaged and canned food in a clean, dry place. Avoid contact with germs. Do not store food under the sink, near sources of heat or humidity such as the oven, stove, water heater or the dishwasher. Keep food elevated from the floor by at least six inches.

Choose packaging that is resistant to moisture and humidity to freeze foods. Store the most perishable foods in the coldest part of the freezer. Use the product within the recommended storage time.

Safe Preparation of Food

Always keep everything very clean. Wash your hands with soap and hot water for 20 seconds before starting to prepare, after touching raw meat and poultry, after touching animals or changing a baby's diaper.

Prevent contamination. Do not let any raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs have contact with food that is about to be served or that has already been prepared. Wash your hands, counters, plates and utensils immediately after use. Don't take chances.

Wash cutting boards with hot water and soap and disinfect them with a solution of two tablespoons of bleach per quart of water.

Defrost perishables in the refrigerator or microwave oven (and cook them immediately). Defrosted foods should be cooked immediately.

Always cook meat, poultry and seafood until they are well-done. For thick cuts of meat, test the internal temperature with a meat thermometer. For thinner cuts, clear juices and the absence of pink in the middle indicates that they are ready. Do not eat hamburgers or poultry that are raw or half-cooked because harmful bacteria may be present. Cook them until there is no pink meat. Avoid cooking these foods in the oven at temperatures below 325 degrees F.

When using electric appliances that cook foods slowly, use small pieces of refrigerated meat and make sure that the recipe includes a

liquid. Cook the food until it reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees F.

Avoid interrupting the cooking process. Never refrigerate partially cooked foods to finish cooking them later. Avoid recipes that do not use a constant source of heat.

If you use a microwave oven, turn the food to cook it uniformly. Observe periods or rest because they are considered part of the cooking time.

Safety When Serving

Never let perishable foods remain in the "danger zone" (from 40 to 140 degrees F where the bacteria reproduces most quickly) for more than two hours. Plan your food preparation to avoid the "danger zone." If delays occur, remember: "keep the hot food hot" (over 140 degrees F) and "the cold food cold" (below 40 degrees F).

Store leftovers immediately. Refrigerate or freeze them in shallow, securely sealed containers. Inadequate refrigeration is the principal cause of food poisoning.

When heating leftovers, cover them and cook them until they steam (at 165 degrees F for solid food, until the boiling point for sauces, soups and wet foods).

When Eating Out or Getting Food "To Go"

Choose well established restaurants of good reputation. Observe if the tables, floors and utensils are clean. Also observe the hygiene of the cooks and servers.

Avoid restaurants (especially buffets) that do not maintain adequate temperatures (above 140 degrees F for hot foods and below 40 degrees F for cold foods).

Make sure that the food that you order is well cooked. Avoid meat, hamburgers, poultry or fish that is half cooked. If food is not cooked adequately, send it back to the kitchen. It is your right. For those persons in high risk groups this is especially important. Do not order dishes with raw or half-cooked eggs

such as Caesar Salad or some flan. If you have doubts, ask how it was prepared or if pasteurized eggs were used.

With carry-out food, avoid restaurants where raw foods are in contact with food that is already prepared. There should be enough carry-out containers. Observe the cleanliness of the utensils and the employees. The food should be kept at adequately hot or cold temperatures. Plan to eat or store these foods properly within one hour of buying them.

Cooking Temperatures

Cooking foods until they have the internal temperature of 160 degrees F protects you from food poisoning. Nevertheless, some foods are considered tastier if cooked to a higher internal temperature. The higher temperatures in this guide indicate a greater degree of cooking.

| Food | Degrees Fahrenheit |
|---|---|
| Eggs and Egg Dishes Eggs Egg dishes | cook until the whites are white and firm 160 |
| Ground meat and mixtures of meat Turkey, chicken Veal, beef, lamb or pork | 170 160 |
| Fresh Beef (roasts, steaks, cutlets) 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 Turkey Turkey breast or roast turkey Muscles and wings Stuffings (cooked inside the bird) Duck and goose | 180 180 170 cook until the juice turns clear 165 180 |
| Ham Fresh (raw) Precooked (to be heated) | 160 140 |
| <i>Source: Preventing Foodborne Illness. United States Department of Agriculture/Food Safety and Inspection Service. Home and Garden bulletin No.247.1990</i> | |

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