

A Quick Consumer Guide To Safe Food Handling

For more information on food handling,
call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline

1-800-535-4555

10-4 weekdays Eastern Time

How this booklet was developed. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service asked food scientists to analyze consumer handling of food in the home using a HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) approach. This booklet, the result of that effort, guides you past those critical points in everyday food handling where experts say making the "wrong" move could lead to foodborne illness.

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This booklet tells you what to do at each step in food handling—from shopping through storing leftovers to avoid food poisoning.

Never had poisoning? Actually, it's called foodborne illness. Perhaps you have, but thought you were sick with the flu. Some 7 million Americans will suffer from foodborne illness this year.

Why? Because at the right temperature, bacteria you can't see, smell or taste can multiply to the millions in a few short hours. In large numbers, they cause illness.

It doesn't have to happen, though. Some 85 percent of cases could be avoided if people just handled food properly. So here's what to do ...

When You Shop

Buy cold food last, get it home fast

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

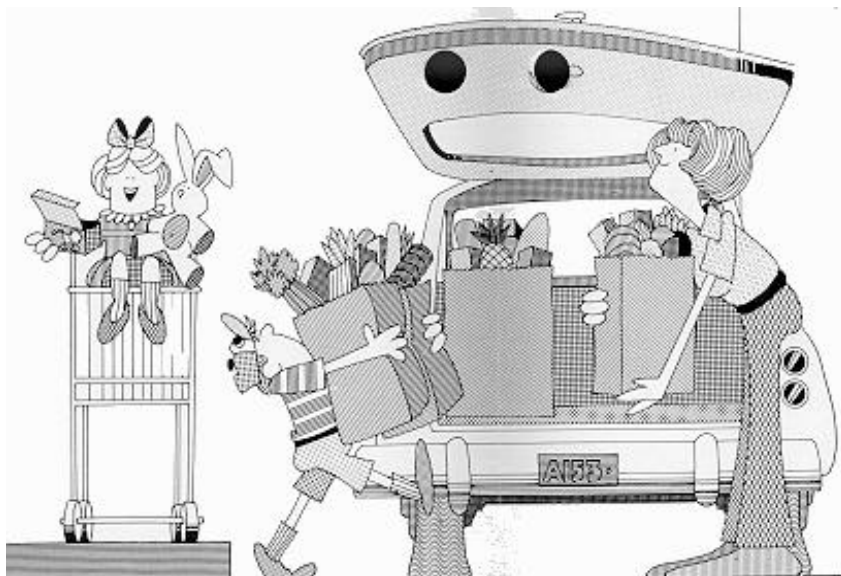
- Don't buy anything you won't use before the use-by date.
- Don't buy food in poor condition. Make sure refrigerated food is cold to the touch. Frozen food should be rock-solid. Conned goods should be free of dents, cracks or bulging lids which can indicate a serious food poisoning threat.

When You Store Food

Keep it safe, refrigerate

Check the temperature of your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer you can buy at a variety or hardware store. To keep bacteria in check, the refrigerator should run at 40° F; the freezer unit at 0° F. Generally, keep your refrigerator as cold as possible without freezing your milk or lettuce.

- 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.
- Bacteria can live in kitchen towels, sponges and cloths. Wash them often, Replace sponges every few weeks.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food, For instance, wash your hands, cutting board and knife in hot soapy water after cutting up the chicken and before dicing salad ingredients.
- Use plastic cutting boards rather than wooden ones where bacteria can hide in grooves,
- Thaw food in the microwave or refrigerator, NOT on the kitchen counter. The danger? Bacteria can grow in the outer layers of the food before the inside thaws. Marinate in the refrigerator too.

When You're Cooking

Cook thoroughly

- It takes thorough cooking to kill harmful bacteria, so you're 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 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 juices run clear. Fish flakes with a fork.
 - 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.
 - When you cook ahead, divide large portions of food into small, shallow containers for refrigeration, This ensures safe, rapid cooling.



Safe Microwaving

A great time saver, 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.

Kept it too long?

When in doubt, throw it out

Safe refrigerator and freezer storage time-limits are given for many common foods in the "Cold Storage" table inside this booklet. But what about something you totally forgot about and may have kept too long?

- Danger- never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it. 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 salamis and firm fruits and vegetables by cutting the mold out- remove a large area around it, most moldy food should be discarded.



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	weeks	Don't Freeze
Raw yolks, whites	2-4 days	1 year
Hardcooked	1 week	Don't Freeze well
Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, opened	3 days	Don't Freeze
unopened	10 days	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 & Vacuum-Packed Products		
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads	3-5 days	
Pre-stuffed pork& lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed with dressing	1 day	
Store-cooked convenience meals	1-2 days	These products don't freeze well
Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal	2 weeks unopened	
Soups & Stews		
Vegetable or meat-added	3-4 days	2-3 months
Hamburger, Ground & Stew Meats		
Hamburger & stew meats	1-2 days	3-4 months
Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb & mixtures of them	1-2 days	3-4 months
Hotdogs & Lunch Meats		
Hotdogs, opened package	1 week	
unopened package	2 weeks	In freezer wrap
Lunch meats, opened unopened	3-5 days	1-2 months
	2 weeks	

	7 days	1 month
Bacon & Sausage	1-2 days	1-2 months
Bacon	7 days	1-2 months
Sausage, raw from pork, beef, turkey	2-3 weeks	1-2 months
Smoked breakfast links, patties		
Hard sausage- pepperoni, jerky sticks		Drained, wrapped
Ham, Corned Beef	7 days	1 month
Corned beef		
In pouch with pickling juices	6-9 months	Don't freeze
Ham, canned	7 days	1-2 months
Label says keep refrigerated	3-5 days	1-2 months
Ham, fully cooked-whole	3-4 days	1-2 months
Ham, fully cooked-half		
Ham, fully cooked-slices	3-5 days	6-12 months
Fresh Meat	3-5 days	4-6 months
Steaks, beef	3-5 days	6-9 months
Chops, pork	3-5 days	6-12 months
Chops, lamb	3-5 days	6-9 months
Racists, beef	3-5 days	4-6 months
Roosts, lamb		
Roasts, pork & veal	1-2 days	3-4 months
Variety meats-Tongue, brain, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings	3-4 days	2-3 months
Meat Leftovers	1-2 days	2-3 months
Cooked meat and meat dishes		
Gravy and meat broth	1-2 days	1 year
Fresh Poultry	1-2 days	9 months
Chicken or turkey, whole	1-2 days	3-4 months
Chicken or turkey pieces		
Giblets	3-4 days	4 months
Cooked Poultry, Leftover	3-4 days	4-6 months
Fried chicken	3-4 days	4 months
Cooked poultry dishes	1-2 days	6 months
Pieces, plain	1-2 days	1-3 months
Pieces covered with broth, gravy		
Chicken nuggets, patties		

COOKING TEMPERATURES

Product

Eggs & Egg Dishes

Eggs

Egg dishes

Ground Meat & Meat Mixtures

Turkey, chicken

Veal, beef, lamb, pork

Fresh Beef

Rare (some bacterial risk)

Medium

Well Done

Fresh Veal

Medium

Well Done

Fresh Lamb

Medium

Well Done

Fresh Pork

Medium

Well Done

Poultry

Chicken, whole

Turkey, whole

Poultry breasts, roasts

Poultry thighs, wings

Stuffing

(cooked alone or in bird)

Duck & Goose

Ham

Fresh (raw)

Pre-cooked (to reheat)

Fahrenheit

Cook until yolk
& white are firm

160

170

160

140

160

170

160

170

160

170

160

170

180

180

170

cook until juices

run clear

165

180

160

140

Powers Out

Your freezer

Without power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen 1 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 4-6 hours depending on the kitchen temperature. A full, well-functioning freezer unit should keep food frozen for 2 days, A half-full freezer unit should keep things frozen about 1 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 2 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. Most often, though, people get sick within 4 to 48 hours after eating bad food.

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.

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