Cooking Safely

Did you know that 1 in 6 Americans will get sick from food poisoning this year? Food poisoning not only sends 128,000 Americans to the hospital each year, it can also have long-term health effects.

The keys to basic food safety are cooking it to the right temperature and handling it properly. Follow these guidelines to keep you, your family, and your guests safe.

For more information on these and other food safety guidelines, please visit www.foodsafety.gov.

Practice Good Hygiene

Use hot water and regular soap to wash your hands. Scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Try humming the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice. Rinse hands, then dry with a clean towel.

Wash your hands often, especially during these key times when germs can spread:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before serving food or eating
- After handling raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, or their juices
- After using the toilet, touching garbage, touching an animal, or picking something up off the floor
- After changing a diaper or taking care of someone who is sick
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing

Cook to Safe Temperatures

Cook all food to the minimum safe internal temperatures on the chart above. Use a food thermometer to be sure your food is safe. When you think your food is done, place the food thermometer in the thickest part of the food, making sure not to touch bone, fat, or gristle.

Safe Internal Food Temperatures	
Poultry	
Whole or Pieces	165°F
Ground	165°F
Beef, Pork, and Lamb	
Steaks/Roasts/Chops	145°F
Ground	160°F
Pre-Cooked Ham	140°F
Seafood	
Fish Fillet/Whole Fish	145°F
Shrimp/Lobster/Crab	Cook until flesh is pearly and opaque
Leftovers and Casseroles	165°F
Egg Dishes	160°F

Separate Hazardous Foods

Use one cutting board for hazardous foods (e.g. raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs) and another for non-hazardous foods (e.g. fresh produce, cooked foods, foods that won't be cooked).

Use separate plates and utensils for cooked and raw foods. Use hot, soapy water to wash all plates, utensils, and cutting boards that touched hazardous foods before using them again.

Refrigerate and Freeze Properly

Your refrigerator should be set to 40°F or below and your freezer to 0°F or below. Use a refrigerator and/or freezer thermometer to be sure. Place raw meat, poultry, and seafood on plates, in containers, or in sealed plastic bags. Freeze them if you're not planning to use them within a few days. Freezing does not kill harmful germs, but it does keep food safe until you can cook it.

Avoid the Danger Zone

Bacteria that cause food poisoning grow quickest between 40°F and 140°F, also known as the danger zone. Never leave perishable foods at room temperature for more than two hours. If the food is exposed to temperatures above 90°F, refrigerate it within one hour.

If you're not serving food right after cooking, keep it out of the temperature danger zone by using a heat source like a chafing dish, warming tray, or slow cooker. Cold foods can be kept on ice or in a cooler for longer serving times.

Never thaw or marinate foods at room temperature. The safest way to thaw or marinate is in the refrigerator or under cool running water. Leftovers should be placed in small shallow containers and refrigerated promptly to allow for quick cooling.

Safe Food Storage Times (Refrigerated at 40°F or Below)

Raw Poultry	
Whole, Pieces, or Ground	1-2 days
Raw Beef, Pork, and Lamb	
Steaks/Roasts/Chops	3-5 days
Pre-Cooked Ham	3-4 days
Ground	1-2 days
Stew Meat	1-2 days
Raw Seafood	
Fish Fillet/Whole Fish	1-2 days
Shrimp/Lobster/Crab	1-2 days
Raw Eggs	
In shell	3-5 weeks
Out of Shell	2-4 days
Cooked Leftovers	
Beef, Pork, and Lamb	3-4 days
Poultry	3-4 days
Seafood	3-4 days
Egg Dishes	3-4 days
Hard-Cooked Eggs, In Shell	7 days
Vegetables and Fruit	5-7 days
Soups and Stews	3-4 days

Wash Produce

Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fruits and vegetables, then rinse under warm running water. Scrub firm produce like melons, potatoes, or cucumbers with a clean produce brush. Air dry or pat dry with a paper towel or clean cloth towel. Don't rinse raw meat, poultry, or seafood to avoid contaminating other surfaces.

When In Doubt, Throw It Out

The germs that make you sick are not always the same ones that cause food to go bad. Don't use smell, taste, and appearance as your only guides. Use the storage times on the table above to guide you. If you're still not sure whether a food item is safe, it's better to be safe than sorry and throw it away.