

Handling Food Safely

Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential to prevent foodborne illness. You can't see, smell, or taste harmful bacteria. Follow the four Fight BAC!™ guidelines to keep food safe:

Clean – Wash hands and surfaces often.

Separate – Don't cross-contaminate.

Cook – Cook to proper temperatures.

Chill – Refrigerate promptly.

Shopping

- Buy refrigerated and frozen items after your non-perishables.
- Never buy meat or poultry in packaging that is torn or leaking.
- Don't buy food past "Sell-By," "Use-By," or other expiration dates.

Storage

- Always refrigerate food within 2 hours (1 hour if above 90°F).
- Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer. The refrigerator should be at or below 40°F and the freezer at or below 0°F.
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, and ground meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days.
- Meat and poultry should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and prevent juices from leaking.
- To maintain quality when freezing meat and poultry in its original package, wrap the package again with foil or plastic wrap made for the freezer.
- In general, high-acid canned food can be stored for 12 to 18 months. Low-acid canned food will keep 2 to 5 years – if the can is in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, and dry place. Throw away cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusty.

Preparation

- Always wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other food. After cutting raw meats, wash cutting board, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water.
- Cutting boards, utensils, and countertops can be sanitized using 1 tablespoon of liquid chlorine bleach diluted in 1 gallon of water.
- Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator.

Thawing

- Refrigerator: The refrigerator allows slow, safe thawing. Make sure meat and poultry juices do not drip onto other food.
- Cold Water: For faster thawing, place food in a leak-proof plastic bag and submerge in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook immediately after thawing.
- Microwave: Cook meat and poultry immediately after microwave thawing.

Cooking

- All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.
- Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops: 145°F.
- All cuts of pork: 160°F.
- Ground beef, veal and lamb: 160°F.

Serving

- Hot food should be held at 140°F or warmer.
- Cold food should be held at 40°F or colder.
- When serving food at a buffet, keep food hot with slow cookers and warming trays. Keep food cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving trays and replace them often.
- Perishable food should not be left out more than 2 hours at room temperature (1 hour if above 90°F).

Leftovers

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour above 90°F).
- Place food in shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.
- Use cooked leftovers within 4 days.

Refreezing

- Meat and poultry defrosted in the refrigerator may be refrozen before or after cooking. If thawed by other methods, cook before refreezing.



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