

Healthy Me!



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The Importance of Food Safety

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Food-borne illnesses and recalls are constantly in the news and each year, 48 million Americans get sick from eating contaminated food. While you cannot completely prevent food-borne illnesses from happening, you can reduce your risks by practicing good food safety at home. This is especially important during the holiday season when enjoying your favorite home cooked dishes and desserts!

Improperly stored, prepared and defrosted food can promote the spread of harmful bacteria, which increases your risk of getting a food-borne illness and accompanying symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea and other flu-like symptoms. These symptoms can last from a few hours to a few days. Certain people including young children, older adults, pregnant women and those with compromised immune systems are particularly vulnerable.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends using four concepts to safely prepare foods: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill. Here are some important food safety techniques to practice while cooking at home:

Safe Food Preparation

- When preparing food, keep your hands and kitchen surfaces that come into contact with raw ingredients clean.
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after handling food. Wash food preparation surfaces with hot, soapy water after making each food item.
- Thoroughly clean fruits and vegetables with water and a produce brush.
- Do not wash raw meat or poultry before cooking as it increases the likelihood of harmful bacteria spreading to your countertops and sink.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave followed by immediate cooking.
- Create separate storage and preparation areas for raw foods that will



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be cooked (like meats) and foods that will be eaten raw (like vegetables).

- Use different cutting boards and utensils as you prepare each food.
- Do not put foods that are ready to be eaten on the same plate that held raw foods or their juices.

Safe Cooking – Also,

remember that food is not properly cooked until it reaches a safe internal temperature. This is the temperature that kills harmful bacteria. The only way to know raw meats and poultry are properly cooked is by using a meat thermometer. Pork products should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145 degrees; ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160 degrees; and chicken and poultry should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees. Properly cooked eggs will have firm yolks and whites. Do not eat any uncooked batter or dough as it could contain raw eggs.

Safe Storage – If you have leftovers after a meal, you still have food safety precautions to take. Put leftovers in the refrigerator within two hours of preparation. Make sure your refrigerator and freezer are cold enough to properly store food. A refrigerator temperature should be at or below 40 degrees. The freezer should be set at zero degrees. Eat leftovers within three to four days. When reheating, make sure food is cooked to 165 degrees. Sauces, soups and gravies should reach a rolling boil. Do not eat leftovers that look or smell questionable. When in doubt, throw it out!!!

More information on food safety is available through the University of Kentucky Nutrition Education Program at <https://kynep.ca.uky.edu> or at your local Cooperative Extension Office.

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