

There's No Place Like Home for Food Safety

When I was a girl growing up on a farm, we knew where all our food came from. The cattle we raised provided us with beef. The pigs we raised gave us our Christmas ham. Even the lard was used for cooking and baking. We had a vegetable garden where we raised snap beans, potatoes, squash, broccoli, turnips, and peas, to name only a few. My grandfather furnished us with fruit from his apple, peach, and plum orchards. There was even a grapevine that climbed the fence and went on into the oak tree to give us grapes. The milk we drank came from our own dairy herd. We sold the extra milk we couldn't use to a creamery. We would, in turn, purchase cheese made from the milk that came from our farm and the farms of our neighbors. The chickens that ran loose in the barnyard provided us with eggs and the hen for Sunday dinner whenever the preacher came. It was a great life. We knew where every piece of food we put in our mouths came from and how safely it had been handled.

How far we have come today! Few of us raise the food we eat as we did when I was growing up. Now we could be eating strawberries from Mexico, raspberries from Guatemala, seafood from China, and beef from Australia. This is one of the major reasons we have such a great deficit in the United States. A deficit of trust! When we hear on the news about bacteria in the food supply, we cringe and think we are helpless against the large food processors. But this is not the case. First of all, the large food manufacturers want to sell you safe food because they want you to continue to purchase their food products. This publication will tell you how you and your family can feel as safe about the food supply as I did growing up on the farm.

This publication will tell you safe ways to shop for food, store food items, cook the food, serve the food, and handle leftovers.



Shopping for Food

Shopping at your local grocery can start you out with safer food. Place raw meats on the bottom of the cart so they will not contaminate any other food products. Also, do not allow cleaning products to come into contact with food items. Get a plastic bag on your way into the store, and place the cleaning items in the bag to prevent cross-contamination with the food items. At the check-out, ask the bagger to place the cleaning items back in the same bag and not in a bag with any food items. Place fresh meats in a plastic bag by themselves so they cannot contaminate any other foods. Place frozen foods in another plastic bag because a larger block of frozen products will remain frozen longer. You should go straight home after shopping. If you know you will not arrive home in less than an hour, take a cooler to store the refrigerated and frozen foods.

Storing Food Items

Put away frozen and refrigerated foods first. The temperature inside your refrigerator should be 40 degrees F or lower, and the freezer should be 0 degrees F or lower. If you do not already have a thermometer in the freezer or refrigerator, this would be a good time to purchase one. This will allow you to tell if your foods are being kept at the right temperature. If you make a practice of checking the temperatures regularly, you might

be able to tell when your freezer or refrigerator is having a cooling problem.

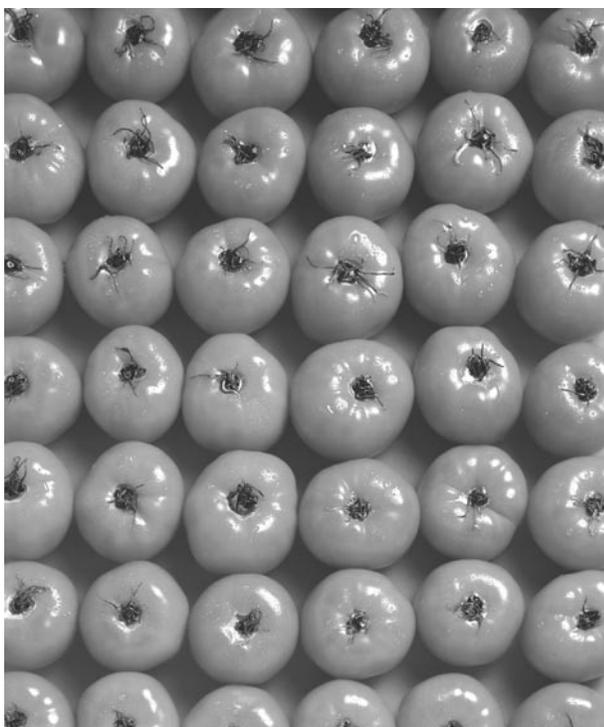
Next, place foods that are stable at room temperature, such as crackers, bread, cake mixes, and other dry foods, on the shelves or in the pantry.

Never store cleaning items with food items. Under the kitchen sink is an excellent place to store cleaning products such as dish detergents, pot cleaners, and sanitizing solutions. Place other cleaning items in the laundry room or in a closet set aside for such items. However, if you have children, be sure to store cleaning products in a locked cupboard or another place where children cannot get to them.

Preparing to Cook

Wash Your Hands

I can still hear my mother telling my sister and me to come and help with the dinner, but first wash our hands. We were not allowed to wash our hands in the kitchen unless we had first washed them in the bathroom. This is an excellent practice to keep dirt and bacteria from your hands out of the kitchen. A good hand-washing takes 20 seconds. This gives you time to get your hands wet, apply the soap, and scrub your nails into the palm of each of your hands, washing each finger and fingernail. Of course we would wash our hands many more times once we were in the kitchen, especially after handling raw meat, cutting up raw fruits or vegetables, and any other time they became soiled in the meal-preparation process.



Clean Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables should always be washed thoroughly under rapidly running cool water. A scrub brush might be necessary to use on certain vegetables, such as potatoes for baking. Of course if it were Sunday dinner, we would peel the potatoes for mashing. Each potato should be peeled, placed in a large bowl, and washed thoroughly under rapidly running cool water after peeling.

If we were preparing potato salad, we would peel the potatoes as described above, and then cook the potatoes and hard-cook the egg. After cooking, allow the potatoes to cool by placing the pan in cold or ice water. The eggs can be cooled by submerging them in cold water for a short period of time. Mix all the ingredients in a bowl, and place the bowl in the refrigerator until serving time.

Fruits on the dining room table for the taking were also washed like the baked potatoes. This not only removes dirt and bacteria but any excess pesticides from the field.

Prepare Meats

Sometimes cooking meats takes advanced planning, especially if the meat is frozen and must be thawed before cooking, like a turkey. Refer to the chart below for thawing times for meats.

Recommended Thawing Times for Meats

2 to 8 pounds	1 day
8 to 12 pounds	1 to 2 days
12 to 16 pounds	2 to 3 days
16 to 20 pounds	3 to 4 days
20 to 24 pounds	4 to 5 days

Place meat in the refrigerator on a plate so juices don't drip on other foods. Although thawing meat in the refrigerator is not the only acceptable

method for thawing meats, it may be one of the safest. You can thaw meats under rapidly running cool water, or you can place the meat in cold water, but you must remember to change the water every 30 minutes. Some meats and other food items can be thawed in the microwave (see your microwave manual for instructions).

When preparing meats like roasts, hamburger, and poultry, you will want to observe a few extra rules. Place meat on a clean cutting board or in a pan for cooking. If you need to cut up a chicken, place it in a large mixing bowl or pan that will allow the juices to be kept from contaminating other surfaces and foods. If you use a cutting board for slicing a roast before cooking it, make sure you sanitize the cutting board with a solution of 2 teaspoons of chlorine bleach per 1 quart of water before using it again. Flood the surface with the bleach solution, and allow it to stand for at least 2 minutes; then rinse it and let it air-dry or pat it dry using fresh paper towels. Also, wash the mixing bowl or other pans that have been contaminated with the raw meat immediately after you have finished preparing your meat dish. Remember, don't use a cutting board or any pot or pan that has come in contact with raw meat before properly sanitizing it.

If you drip any liquid from the meat onto the counter tops, sanitize immediately with a solution of 2 teaspoons of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water before you cross-contaminate any other food items. You can even put this solution into a spray bottle to make it easy to use. Use the following steps.

1. Clean the counter. If you use a cloth rag, be sure to place it into a sink of hot water and chlorine bleach to sanitize the cloth after you have wiped up the spilled liquid. After the liquid is removed, the surface may look clean, but the bacteria are still present.
2. To get rid of the bacteria, spray a mist of chlorine solution over the counter. Make sure you can see the dampness on the counter.
3. Allow the solution to stand on the counter for at least 2 minutes.
4. Wipe off the solution, using a fresh paper towel. Remember, it takes time to kill bacteria. If you want to make bread on the counter surface, make sure the surface is completely dry before proceeding.

Cook the Food

Cooking food is your best insurance for killing bacteria. However, we must remember that foods need to be cooked to different internal tempera-

tures to ensure the death of the microorganisms. The following chart lists the correct cooking temperatures for different meats.

Cooking Temperatures

Ground meats (Beef, veal, lamb, and pork)	160°F
Ground poultry	165°F
Steaks and roasts	145°F (rare) 160°F (medium) 170°F (well done)
Poultry breast	165°F
Poultry thigh	165°F
Whole birds	165°F

If you have meatloaf for dinner, the internal temperature should be 160 degrees F. Measure the internal temperature of a food, using a food thermometer. There are several types available for meat, candy, or both that have a temperature range from 50 degrees F to 220 degrees F.



Serving the Food

Serve hot food hot and cold food cold. It is important to remember that foods should not be out of their temperature range for more than 2 hours. Bacteria can grow more rapidly if foods are left at room temperature more than 2 hours. Take the potato salad or other cold foods out of the refrigerator just before serving them. Enjoy your meal, but when the meal is finished, place all leftovers in the refrigerator for storage. If you have a large amount of meat or poultry left, it is best to cut the poultry off the carcass or place the meat in small containers to allow it to cool more quickly.

Lunching on Leftovers

Label leftovers with the date, and then place them in the refrigerator. Refer to the Cooked Food Storage Chart for safe storage times.

Cooked Food Storage Chart

Cooked ground beef	4 days
Spanish rice	3 days
Cooked beans	2 days
Meat and vegetable stew	2 to 3 days
Casseroles with meat	2 to 3 days
Casseroles without meat	3 to 4 days
Cooked vegetables	4 to 5 days
Prepared puddings and custards	2 to 3 days
Tomato sauce	2 to 3 days
Gravies	2 to 3 days
Hard-cooked eggs	5 to 7 days



If the leftover looks or smells strange, throw it out! It is not worth you or your family getting sick over the cost of any amount of food. If a food is to be heated before you eat it, make sure it is heated to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Remember, the best rule of thumb is

When in Doubt, Throw It Out!



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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