

Keep Food Safe! Food Safety Basics

Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential in preventing foodborne illness. You can't see, smell, or taste harmful bacteria that may cause illness. In every step of food preparation, follow the four guidelines to keep food safe:

- **Clean**—Wash hands and surfaces often.
 - **Separate**—Don't cross-contaminate.
 - **Cook**—Cook to proper temperatures, checking with a food thermometer.
 - **Chill**—Refrigerate promptly.
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Shopping

- Purchase refrigerated or frozen items after selecting your nonperishables.
 - Never choose meat or poultry in packaging that is torn or leaking.
 - Do not buy food past "Sell-By," "Use-By," or other expiration dates.
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Storage

- Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).
- Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer with an appliance thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40 °F or below and the freezer at 0 °F or below.
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days.
- Perishable food such as meat and poultry should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and to prevent meat juices from getting onto other food.
- To maintain quality when freezing meat and poultry in its original package, wrap the package again with foil or plastic wrap that is recommended for the freezer.
- In general, high-acid canned food such as tomatoes, grapefruit, and pineapple can be stored unopened on the shelf for 12 to 18 months. Low-acid canned food such as meat, poultry, fish, and most vegetables will keep 2 to 5 years-if the unopened can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, and dry place. Discard cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted.

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Thawing

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

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Preparation

- Always wash hands with soap and warm water 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, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
- Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator.
- Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water.

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Cooking

Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F as measured with a food thermometer before removing meat from the heat source. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat to higher temperatures.

Ground meats: Cook all raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal to an internal temperature of 160 °F as measured with a food thermometer.

Poultry: Cook all poultry to an internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer.

Cooking		
Product	Type	Minimum Internal Temperature & Rest Time
Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb	Ground	160 °F
	Steak, chops, and roasts	145 °F and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
Chicken & Turkey	Breasts	165 °F

	Ground, stuffing, and casseroles	165 °F
	Whole bird, legs, thighs, and wings	165 °F
Eggs	Any type	160 °F
Fish & Shellfish	Any type	145 °F
Leftovers	Any type	165 °F
Ham	Fresh or smoked (uncooked)	145 °F and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
	Fully cooked ham (to reheat)	Reheat cooked hams packaged in USDA-inspected plants to 140 °F and all others to 165 °F.

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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 hot food hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Keep cold food cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving trays and replace them often.

Use a food thermometer to check hot and cold holding temperatures.

Perishable food should not be left out more than 2 hours at room temperature (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).

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Leftovers

Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour if the temperature was above 90 °F).

Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.

Use most cooked leftovers within 3 to 4 days. (See chart.)

Reheat leftovers to 165 °F.