
FOOD SAFETY FOR SENIORS



Studies have shown that seniors do a better job at food handling than any other age group. That said, when it comes to food safety, you can never be too careful. Preventing the growth of dangerous microorganisms in food is the key to reducing the millions of illnesses and thousands of deaths that occur each year due to dangerous bacteria in the food we eat.



There have been many changes in the way food is produced and distributed over the course of your lifetime. It used to be that the great majority of food was produced close to where people lived. Many people shopped daily and prepared all of their food at home. Going out to a restaurant was only for very special occasions.

Today, food in your grocery store comes from all over the world and nearly half of the money Americans spend on food is for food other people prepare like carry-out and restaurant meals.

Because your immune system weakens with age and your body does not produce as much stomach acid as when you were younger, your body is at a higher risk of illness from food borne bacteria. Underlying illnesses such as diabetes, some cancer treatments, and kidney disease can also make you more susceptible to contaminants in food.

It can often be difficult for people to recognize when harmful bacteria has made them sick. Often people assume that their illness was caused by their last meal. In fact, there is a wide range of time between eating food with harmful bacteria and the onset of illness (anywhere from 20 minutes to several days).

The Food & Drug Administration has 4 basic rules when preparing foods at home that will help keep you safe: **Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill.**

Clean

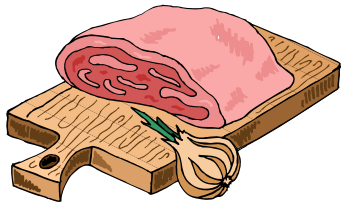
Bacteria can be present just about anywhere in your kitchen.

- Wash your hands before and after handling food.
- Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with warm soapy water. Periodically use a kitchen sanitizer with bleach for added protection.
- Replace worn cutting boards.
- Use paper towels for wiping up.

Dutchess County Division of Aging Services
(845) 486-2555 or toll free at (866) 486-2555

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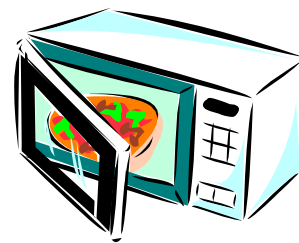
Separate

Cross-contamination is when bacteria is spread from one food product to another. This can be especially dangerous when dealing with raw meat, poultry and seafood.

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery cart and in your refrigerator.
- Use a separate cutting board for raw meat products.
- Always wash your hands, cutting boards, dishes and utensils after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and unwashed fresh produce.
- Place cooked food on a clean plate. Never re-use a plate that held raw food.
- Use a clean food thermometer which measures the internal temperature of cooked foods to be sure food is thoroughly cooked.
- Roasts and steaks should be cooked to at least 145 degrees. Whole poultry should be cooked to 180 degrees while breasts alone can be cooked to at least 170 degrees.
- Cook ground beef to at least 160 degrees. This type of meat is subject to dangerous bacteria spread through its processing.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Don't use recipes in which the eggs remain raw or only partially cooked.
- Fish should be opaque and flake easily with a fork.
- When cooking in a microwave oven, make sure there are no cold spots in food where bacteria can survive. Use a turntable in your microwave if you do not have one already.
- When re-heating leftovers, food should be heated to at least 165 degrees.

Cook

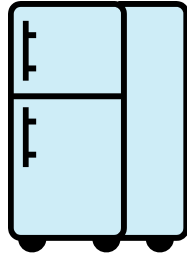
Food safety experts agree that foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria.



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Chill

Did you know that at room temperature, bacteria in food can double every 20 minutes? Cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from multiplying—so be sure to refrigerate foods quickly. Set your refrigerator no higher than 40 degrees and the freezer at 0 degrees.

- Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers within 2 hours.
- Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.
- Never thaw foods at room temperature. Thaw them in the refrigerator. Four to five pounds will easily thaw in 24 hours.
- You can also thaw foods in cold water. Change the water every half hour to keep it cold.
- Thaw foods in the microwave only when you plan on cooking them right away.
- Marinate foods in the refrigerator.

- Don't pack the refrigerator too full as cold air must circulate to keep food safely cold.



Home Delivered Meals

If you receive Home Delivered Meals or use any of the “meals to go” services that are so convenient, keep in mind that proper handling is essential to ensure the food is safe.

- Harmful bacteria can multiply quickly—so remember to discard any perishables left at room temperature for more than 2 hours or put them immediately in the oven at 140 degrees to keep them hot. You can also quickly refrigerate the meal for reheating later to 165 degrees.
- The same 2 hour rule applies when you take food home from your favorite restaurant. Take the food directly home and to the refrigerator.

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