

Food Safety Mistakes You Do Not Want to Make

#1 Using Dirty Hands to Prepare Foods

We all know we should wash our hands before preparing food. But, did you know that not washing your hands before and during food preparation causes most foodborne illnesses? Here is how to properly wash your hands: Wet your hands under warm water. Add hand soap and scrub for 10-15 seconds before rinsing off all soap. Use a clean towel or paper towel to thoroughly dry your hands.

#2 Cross-Contaminating

Cross-contamination is an important source of foodborne illness. Cross-contamination happens when kitchen equipment is used to prepare raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs, and then is not properly washed before preparing other foods. Harmful bacteria can transfer from these raw foods to other foods if the surface is not washed properly between uses. To prevent this, thoroughly wash any surfaces, including your hands, which come in contact with raw meat, poultry, fish or eggs.

- Clean all cutting boards, knives, utensils and counter tops with warm, soapy water before food preparation begins.
- Use one cutting board for raw meat, poultry or seafood, and a different cutting board for ready-to-eat foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese and bread.
- Sanitize cutting boards that have been in contact with raw meat, poultry or seafood. To sanitize, put the board in a solution of 1 tablespoon liquid chlorine bleach in a gallon of warm (not hot) water and leave for several minutes. Plastic cutting boards can also be sanitized in a dishwasher using the wash and dry cycle.

- To sanitize kitchen counters, first wash with hot, soapy water. Then use 1 tablespoon unscented chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water (or $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon in one quart of water) and spread on the counter. Let sit for several minutes and dry with paper towels.
- Sanitize a non-metal kitchen sponge by heating it, while still wet, in a microwave oven for 1 to 1½ minutes. Avoid burns by allowing the sponge to cool before using it.
- Use paper towels to clean up raw meat, poultry and seafood spills on kitchen counters and other surfaces. Wash kitchen cloths and towels, which have been in contact with raw meat juices, in the hot cycle of the washing machine and dry in the dryer before reusing them.

#3 Guessing Food is Done

Bacteria can survive on foods that are not properly cooked. Guessing if food is done by looking at changes in the color of meat and poultry is not a good practice. Ground beef can turn brown and look done before it is safely cooked. The best way to know that food is done is to use a food thermometer. A metal-stem, digital thermometer is easy to use and removes the guesswork of when the food is done. You can buy one at nearly any department store or grocery store.

- Clean the stem and insert into the thickest part of the food to get an accurate reading.
- Use your food thermometer to make sure the foods reach the internal temperatures shown in the chart below. These are minimum temperatures; if preferred, meats may be cooked more well-done.

Minimum Internal Temperatures of Foods

Temperature	Food
145 °F	Fish steaks or fillets. All cuts of beef, lamb, pork and veal. For both safety and quality, allow meat to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
155 °F	Ground, mechanically tenderized or injected meats. Ground fish. Egg dishes.
165 °F	Poultry and wild game. Stuffing and casseroles.

#4 Storing Leftovers Unsafely

Bacteria like warm temperatures especially while foods are sitting on the countertop or when they are cooling down in the refrigerator. Refrigerate leftovers quickly so bacteria will not grow.

- As soon as you finish a meal, refrigerate your leftovers. Make sure your refrigerator is 40 °F or colder.
- Put a piece of tape on the container and write the date on the tape. It is best to use refrigerated leftovers within 4 days. If you won't be eating your leftovers in that time, put them in the freezer where they will keep safely.
- Never put a big pot of hot food in the refrigerator—it will take too long to cool to a safe temperature. Put liquid foods like hot soup or chili in shallow containers, no more than 2 inches deep. Refrigerate or freeze quickly.

For more information see [HGIC 3580, *Cooking Meat Safely*](#), [HGIC 3606, *Leftovers*](#), and [HGIC 3566, *Food Safety Pitfalls at Thanksgiving & Beyond*](#).

Sources:

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