

Commentary

Food Poisoning-Prevention

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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To prevent food poisoning at home:

- Wash your hands, utensils and food surfaces often. Wash your hands well with warm, soapy water before and after handling or preparing food. Use hot, soapy water to wash utensils, cutting boards and other surfaces you use.
- Keep raw foods separate from ready-to-eat foods. When shopping, preparing food or storing food, keep raw meat, poultry, fish and shellfish away from other foods. This prevents cross-contamination.
- Cook foods to a safe temperature. The best way to tell if foods are cooked to a safe temperature is to use a food thermometer. You can kill harmful organisms in most foods by cooking them to the right temperature.
- Cook ground beef to 160 F (71.1 C); steaks, roasts chops, such as lamb, pork and veal, to at least 145 F (62.8 C). Cook chicken and turkey to 165 F (73.9 C). Make sure fish and shellfish are cooked thoroughly.
- Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods promptly — within two hours of purchasing or preparing them. If the room temperature is above 90 F (32.2 C), refrigerate perishable foods within one hour.
- Defrost food safely. Don't thaw food at room temperature. The safest way to thaw food is to defrost it in the refrigerator. If you microwave frozen food using the "defrost" or "50 percent power" setting, be sure to cook it immediately.
- Throw it out when in doubt. If you aren't sure if a food has been prepared, served or stored safely, discard it. Food left at room temperature too long may contain bacteria or toxins that can't be destroyed by cooking. Don't taste food that you're unsure about — just throw it out. Even if it looks and smells fine, it may not be safe to eat.

Food poisoning is especially serious and potentially life-threatening for young children, pregnant women and their fetuses, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems. These individuals should take extra precautions by avoiding the following foods:

- Raw or rare meat and poultry
- Raw or undercooked fish or shellfish, including oysters, clams, mussels and scallops
- Raw or undercooked eggs or foods that may contain them, such as cookie dough and homemade ice cream
- Raw sprouts, such as alfalfa, bean, clover and radish sprouts
- Unpasteurized juices and ciders
- Unpasteurized milk and milk products
- Soft cheeses, such as feta, Brie and Camembert; blue-veined cheese; and unpasteurized cheese
- Refrigerated pates and meat spreads
- Uncooked hot dogs, luncheon meats and deli meats

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