

# Purchasing, Preparing and Storing Food Safely

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You can't always taste, see or smell bacteria that can make you sick. However, foodborne illnesses affect about one in every six Americans each year, and these problems often lead to high medical bills. **Follow these food safety guidelines to keep your family safe.**

## FOOD SAFETY STEPS

**Clean**



**Separate**



**Cook**



**Chill**



### Remember these four important steps for food safety:

1. **Clean** – Wash your hands and surfaces where you prepare food often.
2. **Separate** – Keep different foods away from each other to avoid cross-contamination.
3. **Cook** – Cook and reheat your food to the right temperature.
4. **Chill** – Refrigerate or freeze your food as soon as possible.

Food safety should be a key consideration in every step of buying, preparing and storing food. Here are some tips to remember that even shopping at the grocery store includes food safety steps.

### When you shop:

- Get refrigerated or frozen food last before checking out.
- Check expiration dates and don't buy food that is past the "sell by" or "use by" date.

### When you store:

- Keep your refrigerator at or below 40 F and your freezer at or below 0 F.
- Always refrigerate perishable foods within two hours.

### When you prepare:

- Wash your hands well with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.

Keep raw meat, poultry, fish and their juices separate from other foods. Wash knives, cutting boards or other utensils right away in hot, soapy water.

### When you thaw:

- In the refrigerator—this is the safest way to thaw food, so it doesn't drip on other items.
- With cold water—put food in a plastic bag, submerge it in cold water, change the water every 30 minutes and cook it right after thawing.
- In the microwave—cook meat and poultry immediately after thawing.

### When you cook:

- Cook all meat, poultry and fish to the minimum recommended temperature.
- Use a thermometer to check the internal temperature of food when it is off the heat.

### When you serve:

- Keep hot food hot—it should be at 140 F or above.
- Keep cold food cold—it should be at 40 F or below.

### When you have leftovers:

- Throw away any perishable food that was left out for more than two hours.
- Use cooked leftovers within four days.
- Reheat leftovers to 165 F.

### Safe Food Storage Do's and Don'ts

#### Do:

- Put open packages in an airtight container and store them on a cool, dry, clean shelf. This helps prevent food from going stale and keeps pests away.
- Check the label of canned foods before storing. Some need refrigeration.
- Cool hot foods before putting them in the freezer or refrigerator (but remember to store them within two hours).
- Label all freezer meals and leftovers with dates to track when you stored them.
- Use a thermometer to ensure your refrigerator stays below 40 F and your freezer stays at 0 F.

## STORING FOOD the Right Way

### DO

- ✓ Store in airtight containers
- ✓ Cool hot food before refrigerating
- ✓ Label and date leftovers
- ✓ Clean spills often, cover stored food
- ✓ Freeze by "use by" date

### DON'T

- ✗ Store food near cleaners or pesticides
- ✗ Put food on the floor
- ✗ Overcrowd the fridge
- ✗ Leave food out over 2 hours
- ✗ Eat leftovers older than 3 days

- To prevent bacteria growth, clean up spills, clean your refrigerator often and keep stored foods covered.
- Freeze food by the "use by" date to extend its shelf life. Quality may decrease after three to 12 months.
- Learn about food product dating (like "best buy" and "sell by" dates) to reduce waste.

#### Don't:

- Don't store dry food near pesticides or cleaning supplies.
- Don't put food on the floor to prevent attracting rodents, insects, and other pests.
- Don't overcrowd your refrigerator; this helps maintain the best temperature.
- Don't forget the two-hour rule: leftovers, takeout and newly purchased food should be stored in the fridge or freezer within two hours.
- Don't eat old leftovers—they should be consumed within two to three days.



## **Organize Your Kitchen for Safe Food Storage**

Here are some tips for safely storing food in your kitchen.

First, place cooked foods like leftovers on the upper shelves and store raw meat and fish on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator to avoid any dripping onto ready-to-eat items.

Second, keep eggs and dairy products in the back of the fridge where it's coldest. Also, store fruits and vegetables separately in the crisper to maintain moisture and keep them fresh longer.

Finally, keep your kitchen organized so you know what food you have and what has passed its prime. Rotate dry storage items using a first-in/first-out method to use older pantry items first.



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