Prevent Foodborne Illness: A Consumer’s Guide

Smart food safety choices from market to table can help prevent risk of foodborne illness. Choose to purchase, store, prepare and serve foods following the FightBAC™ four simple steps of safe food handling.

1. CLEAN hands and food preparation utensils and surfaces often with hot soapy water.
2. SEPARATE cooked food from raw foods to avoid cross contamination.
3. COOK food products to proper temperatures to kill bacteria that cause foodborne illness.
4. CHILL perishable products promptly at 40 degrees F or below.

Apply the simple steps in everyday food handling practices.

**Shopping for Safety**

Plan grocery shopping trips. Fill the grocery cart with perishable foods - meats, poultry, fish, eggs, milk products - last. Plan grocery shopping as a last stop before returning home to refrigerate or freeze perishable items. Do this within one hour if possible.

Choose packaged foods with sound packaging; no evidence of tears, rips, etc. For frozen or refrigerated products, choose only products that are in the proper display case and in good shape.

Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods, particularly foods that will be eaten without further cooking. Use plastic bags for produce to protect from cross contamination. Putting raw meat in plastic bags will also keep juices from getting on other foods.

Look for “use by,” “sell by,” “pull” dates. Choose only those products with dates that have not expired and plan to use within recommended time.

**Safe Storage**

Maintain adequate refrigerator temperature of 40 degrees F or below and freezer temperature of 0 degrees F or below. Use an appliance thermometer to check these.

Store most perishable items - fish, meats, eggs - in coldest portions of the refrigerator. Don’t store eggs or milk on the refrigerator door where drafts cause the temperature to fluctuate.

Keep refrigerator clean. Spills encourage spoilage and bacterial growth.

To avoid cross contamination, keep raw meat, poultry or seafood, and their dripping juices, away from other foods, particularly those not further cooked. Wrap or place in separate plastic
bags and set on a plate on the lowest shelf of
the refrigerator to keep juices from dripping on
other foods.

Store dry packaged and canned goods in a
clean, dry place. Avoid contact with pests. Do
not store food under sink, by heat sources such
as oven, range, dishwasher, or hot water heater,
or near moisture. Keep them at least 6 inches
from the floor.

Choose moisture-vapor proof wrap or materials
for freezing foods. Store most perishable items
in the coldest part of the freezer. Use within rec-
ommended storage times.

**Safe Food Preparation**

Practice cleanliness at all times, washing hands
with soap and hot water for 20 seconds before
beginning preparation, after handling raw meat
or poultry, after touching animals, after using
bathroom or after changing diapers.

Prevent cross contamination. Don’t let any-
thing from raw meat, poultry, seafood or eggs
come into contact with any food to be served
or already prepared. Wash hands, counters,
equipment and utensils with soap and water
immediately after use. Don’t take a chance!

Carefully wash cutting boards with hot soapy
water and then sanitize with a solution of 2 tea-
spoons bleach per quart of water.

Thaw perishable foods in the refrigerator or in a
microwave oven (followed immediately by
cooking). Thawed foods should be cooked
immediately.

Always cook meats, poultry, fish, seafood and
eggs to doneness. It is best to use a meat ther-
nometer to check that internal temperatures of
roasts and steaks are at least 145 degrees F for
medium rare or 170 degrees F for well done,
whole poultry is 180 degrees F, and ground beef
is 160 degrees F. If no thermometer is available,
look for clear juices and lack of pink in the cen-
ter as signs of doneness.

When using slow cookers, always defrost meat
or poultry before putting in cooker. Choose to
make foods with a high liquid content such as
soups or stews. Cut foods into chunks to ensure
even cooking. Don’t use large pieces of roast or
whole chicken for safety reasons. Fill cooker no
less than half full and no more than two-thirds
full. If possible turn the cooker on highest set-
ting for the first hour and then lower to recipe’s
instructed setting.

Avoid interrupted cooking. Never refrigerate
partially cooked foods to finish cooking them
later. Also avoid recipes calling for a non-con-
stant heat source.

If you choose to microwave, cover and rotate
foods for even cooking to avoid cold spots.
Observe standing time recommendations
because this is considered part of the cooking
time for doneness.

**Smart Serving**

Never leave perishable foods in the “danger
zone” (40 degrees F to 140 degrees F where bac-
teria grow most rapidly) for more than 2 hours.
Plan cooking and serving times so as to follow
this guideline. If you run into delayed serving
times, remember to keep “hot foods hot”
(above 140 degrees F) and “cold foods cold”
(below 40 degrees F).

Take care of leftovers immediately. Refrigerate
or freeze food in shallow covered containers.
Improper cooling is a primary food handling
practice that causes foodborne illness.

When reheating leftovers, cover and heat until
steaming hot, to 165 degrees F, and to a rolling
boil for sauces, soups, gravies and “wet foods.”

**When Dining Out or Taking Out**

Choose well-established, reputable eating estab-
lishments. Look for cleanliness of tables, floors,
dinnerware and personal hygiene of waiters or
cooks.

Avoid restaurants (especially with buffets) that
do not keep foods at adequate holding tempera-
tures (140 degrees F or above for “hot” foods,
40 degrees F or below for “cold” foods).
Restaurants should have a sign that states that clean plates should be used for each trip to the buffet.

Make sure the food you order is well-cooked. Avoid partially or undercooked meats, hamburgers, poultry and fish. If foods are not well done, send them back. It's your right. For those persons in high risk categories such as young children, pregnant women and the elderly, this is especially important. Also, don’t order dishes with raw or undercooked eggs, such as Caesar salad or some custards. If in doubt, ask how a food is prepared, such as if pasteurized eggs are used.

For take-outs, avoid delis where prepared foods are touching raw foods. Suitable containers for take-out should be provided. Look for cleanliness of clerks and equipment. Foods should be held at adequate hot or cold temperatures. Plan to either eat or properly store these foods within 1 hour of purchase or less.

References


http://www.fightbac.org