



## Food Safety

The following are a few quick, easy and effective food safety tips that you should follow to ensure a safer and healthier household both during these hot summer months, and all the year through.

### Food safety starts at the grocery store

- Make the store your last stop before you go home.
- Never purchase outdated, broken, or dented goods. Damaged canned or packaged foods may be contaminated because the airtight seal has been broken. And always avoid bulging cans.
- Take time to alert store personnel of any damaged goods in order to eliminate the possibility of contaminated products reaching others.
- When purchasing frozen foods, always select items from display cases that are below the “frost line” or Load Line” (the line marked on commercial freezer cabinets which indicates the safety level).
- Select refrigerated and frozen food items last. This prevents spoilage and safeguards against temperature loss while you shop.
- Be sure that all refrigerated and frozen items are bagged separately. Uncooked meats should not be bagged with any other products (bakery items, produce, etc.) Store these items away first when you arrive home. Always place refrigerated items in the coolest area of the car, especially during warm months.

### Food safety on the go

When on the go, practice the same habits you would at home. Keep cold foods cold. Frozen juice boxes can double as “ice blocks” to keep other food items chilled. Place them in a sealed plastic bag to prevent others foods from becoming damp. Place the bag in an insulated container. By mealtime, the juice will be melted enough to drink while keeping the temperature cool in the lunch box. Gel packs, which are available in most stores, also make a convenient, non-messy cooling medium.

### Food safety in the home

The key to food safety at home is to prevent bacteria from growing. This can be accomplished by controlling temperatures and following basic sanitation practices. Cross contamination occurs when bacteria is transferred during food preparation. This happens, for example, when people do not wash their hands after handling raw meat. Bacterial growth also occurs if ingredients are improperly cooled or if food dishes are left out too long after serving.

### We suggest the following practices:

- Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables (including onions) before cooking or eating. Dirt, insects, pesticides and other people handling unwrapped produce may cause contamination and bacterial growth in food.
- Never thaw frozen food at room temperature! It is best to let foods thaw overnight in the refrigerator in a covered container, under cold running water or in the microwave.
- Always check frozen food labels for preparation and serving instructions. Unless otherwise stated on the container, do not refreeze.
- To prevent contamination, always place cooked food above raw items in your refrigerator. Be sure everything is covered when stacking them; this ensures that particles from the shelf above won't fall onto the foods below.
- Use hard plastic cutting surfaces because they can be easily washed and sanitized after each use.
- Before preparing foods on any surface clean surfaces with a mixture of hot, soapy water; rinse thoroughly; and then sanitize with a solution containing chlorine bleach. Mix one cap of bleach to



1 gallon of cold water. You can put some chlorine bleach in a spray bottle for quick use. Change weekly to assure that the bleach hasn't evaporated. Commercially prepared counter cleaners containing chlorine may also be used.

- Always sanitize can openers after each use. Look for nicks on the cutting wheel because these may produce metal slivers that could fall into the product you are opening.
- "Cross Contamination" can be prevented. It usually occurs when plates and cookware used in preparing raw foods are not thoroughly "washed-rinsed-sanitized" before using with cooked foods.
- Wooden tables harbor germs. Since children tend to spill food and place items directly on the table, it is very important to clean and sanitize after every use.
- Cross contamination may also occur when different utensils or plates are used. For example, use separate plates to transport raw chicken to the barbeque grill and for bringing the cooked product back. Sanitize both after use.
- All tops of cans and bottles should be properly washed and wiped clean before use, as they carry germs and bacteria.
- Before and after eating and cooking you should always wash your hands to eliminate any germs or bacteria from contaminating your food.

#### **Here are simple steps to follow when properly washing your hands:**

- Use soap and warm water
- Rub hands together for at least 20 to 30 seconds
- Insure you work the soap into the hands and especially between the fingers and fingernail area.
- Rinse hands thoroughly with water and dry hands completely.

Remember: To maintain your newly washed hands do not touch other objects, which have not been cleaned (i.e. door knobs, dirty utensils, and work surfaces),

#### **What to do with leftovers**

- Most meat should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 140 degrees F. Poultry and stuffed meat items should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 degrees F. Pork should reach an internal temperature of 150 degrees F. Always use a meat thermometer. Cold foods should be served at a temperature of 40 degrees F or less.
- Leftover food items should be chilled as soon as possible. It is best to break down large food items into smaller portions before refrigerating. This promotes faster chilling.
- Refrigerate leftovers immediately. They should be taken as quickly as possible from the proper serving temperature (140 – 180 degrees F) to the proper refrigeration temperature (40 degrees F).
- Health experts strongly suggest that when re-heating leftover food, bring it to a temperature of at least 165 degrees F to eliminate any bacterial growth. When using a microwave for re-heating, place food in a covered dish. This retains the heat providing more even distribution. Use a meat thermometer to check temperatures.

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