



# Food Safety & Nutrition

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## “Four Steps To Food Safety”

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September is National Food Safety Education, an annual observance to focus attention on the importance of safe food handling and preparation in both home and commercial kitchens. Four Steps To Food Safety is this year's theme. The emphasis is to increase awareness of the invisible cause of foodborne illness—micro-organisms that may make food unsafe when the four basic messages, Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill, are not followed. These are messages that most of us have heard several times but often need to be reminded. Below is a review of each of the Four Steps To Food Safety that can help prevent foodborne illness in your home.

### Clean!

The kitchen is one of the most dangerous places in the house because of the infectious bacteria that are sometimes found in raw food such as chicken. Also, there is a potential for germs to be spread to other people because that is where food is prepared. You cannot always tell where or when germs are hiding. When you touch a contaminated object you can contaminate other surfaces that you touch afterwards and spread the germs to others.

Everything that touches food should be clean. Cleanliness is a major factor in preventing foodborne illness. Even with food safety inspection and monitoring at Federal, State, and local government facilities, the consumers have a role of ensuring that food is handled safely after it is purchased.

One way to help you keep germs away is to routinely clean and disinfect surfaces. Cleaning and disinfecting are not the same thing. In most cases, cleaning with soap and water is adequate. It removes dirt and most of the germs. However, in other situations disinfecting provides an extra margin of safety.

You should disinfect areas where there are both high concentrations of dangerous germs and a possibility that they will be spread to others surfaces. Disinfectants, including solutions of household bleach, have ingredients that destroy bacteria and other germs. While surfaces may look clean, many infectious germs may be lurking around. Given the right conditions some germs can live on surfaces for hours and even for days.

### Separate!

Fight cross-contamination! Cross-contamination is the transfer of harmful bacteria to food from other foods, cutting boards, and utensils. An example of cross-contamination is cutting raw meat, poultry, or fish on a cutting board and then slicing salad vegetables on the same cutting board without washing the cutting board between uses. By following these simple steps, you can prevent cross-contamination and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

- Always wash hands, cutting boards, dishes, and utensils with hot, soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- If possible, use one cutting board for fresh produce and use a separate one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.

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- Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that previously held raw food.
  - Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and in your refrigerator.
  - To prevent juices from raw meat, poultry, or seafood from dripping onto other foods in the refrigerator, place these raw foods in sealed containers or plastic bags.
  - Sauce that is used to marinate raw meat, poultry, or seafood should not be used on cooked foods, unless it is boiled before applying.

## Cook!

Use a food thermometer in cooking. Using a food thermometer is the only way to tell if food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy harmful micro-organisms. Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of foods, such as meat, hamburgers, poultry, egg casseroles, and any combination dishes. This practice will help to ensure that a safe temperature is reached and that harmful bacteria like Salmonella and Escherichia coli O157:H7 are destroyed.

Many people think they know when food is “done” just by “eyeballing it.” They look at it and trust their experience. Experience is good, but it sometimes can be misleading. For instance, cooking by color is definitely misleading. Meat color—pink or brown—can fool you!

If you think that hamburger is cooked when it is brown inside – think about this ...1 out of every 4 hamburgers turns brown in the middle BEFORE it has reached a safe internal temperature, according to recent USDA research.

## Chill!

Make sure the temperature in the refrigerator is 40 °F or below and 0 °F or below in the freezer. Use a refrigerator/freezer thermometer to check the temperature. Harmful bacteria grow most rapidly in the Danger Zone—the unsafe temperatures between 40 and 140 °F—so it’s important to keep food out of this temperature range. Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food, and leftovers within 2 hours of purchase or preparation, or within 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F. Thaw food in the refrigerator. For quick thawing, submerge in cold water in airtight packaging, or thaw in the microwave, and cook the food immediately.

To learn more about safe food handling, check out the Fight BAC web site at [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org), call the FDA Food Information Line at 888 SAFE FOOD or contact WSU Extension at 397-6060 ext. 0 for publications on storing foods safely, safe cooking temperatures and basic food safety tips.

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