Safe Food Handling Prevents Foodborne Illness

Salmonella, E. coli and Campylobacter are bacteria most commonly-recognized for causing an estimated 76 million cases of foodborne disease in the United States each year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in six, or 48 million Americans, contracts a foodborne illness each year. Of those that become sick, nearly 128,000 people will be hospitalized, and 3,000 will die as a result of their illness.

There are easy and effective steps to help lessen the chance of contracting a foodborne illness.

Chill
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Refrigerate leftovers to less than 41°F or 5 °C as soon as possible, but definitely within 2 hours.
- Use shallow pans and loosely cover hot foods while in the refrigerator to facilitate cooling and allow warm air to escape.
- Select cold foods at the grocery store last, and put them away first when you get home to keep them cold.
- Refrigerated foods that are packaged in hermetically sealed or vacuum packaged containers should always be stored in the refrigerator.
- Follow package instructions, especially when it comes to keeping foods refrigerated.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or in a microwave immediately prior to cooking. Never thaw frozen foods on the counter.

Clean
- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Scrub cutting boards with hot, soapy water after preparing each item and before moving on to the next food.
- Wash and thoroughly rinse utensils and cutting boards with soap and water.
- Cover any cuts or skin abrasions on your hands to avoid contaminating the food.
- Keep pets and household chemicals away from food preparation areas.

Prevent Cross Contamination
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate.
- Use separate cutting boards and knives for chopping ready-to-eat produce and raw meats.
- Never rinse raw poultry because it spreads germs around the kitchen sink, which can serve as a source of contamination for other foods.
- Discard used marinades.
- Use clean utensils and plates to remove cooked foods from grills and pans. Never place cooked foods back into the dish that held the raw or uncooked foods.
• Separate raw and uncooked meats from ready-to-eat items when shopping at the grocery store. Place raw meats in disposable, plastic bags away from other foods.
• If you use reusable shopping bags for groceries, designate specific bags for meats to avoid cross-contamination. Wash and dry bags as they become soiled.
• Store bags used for groceries at home in a manner that protects them from other sources of contamination such as pets, children, and chemicals.
• Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator in water-tight containers to prevent juices from leaking onto ready-to-eat and cooked foods.

Cook
• Use an accurate thermometer to measure the final internal temperature of meat and meat products. Color is an inaccurate way to determine if meat is sufficiently cooked.
• Measure the temperature in the thickest part of the food, ensuring the thermometer does not touch bone or the cooking pan, which can give you an inaccurate reading.
• Wash thermometers after each use.
• Wait until foods are completely cooked before taste testing.
• When using a microwave to cook or reheat food, be sure to rotate or stir the food to facilitate thorough heating. Additionally, some labels recommend a “resting time” for the food after cooking before it should be served.

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