



Food Safety: Preventing Food-Borne Illness

*University of
Pittsburgh
Medical Center
Information
for Patients*

Food-borne illness can cause a variety of symptoms. These symptoms can be severe or life threatening to small children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

The prime cause of food-borne illness is bacteria, like *E. coli*, salmonella, staphylococcus aureus, and botulinum.

Proper steps for food handling, storage, and preparation can prevent most food-borne illness.

Food Handling and Storage

- Do not buy food in damaged packages or cans.
- Look for expiration dates on food packages. Do not buy outdated foods.
- Put perishable foods in the refrigerator or freezer as soon as possible after grocery shopping.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, and fish in a separate shopping bag, so the juice does not drip onto other food.
- Buy only pasteurized milk, cheese, ciders, and juices.

Food Preparation

- Wash your hands with hot soapy water before and after preparing foods.
- Thaw food in the refrigerator or microwave oven, not on the kitchen counter.

- Prevent spreading bacteria (cross-contamination) by washing cutting boards, utensils, and countertops with hot soapy water after cutting raw meat and poultry products and before using them for vegetables, salad ingredients, and ready-to-eat foods.
- Cook foods thoroughly to kill harmful bacteria. Do not eat raw, rare, or partially cooked meat, poultry, or seafood. Use a thermometer to check that meat is completely cooked. Red meat should be at 160° F and whole poultry should be at 180° F.
- Cook fish until it is opaque and flakes easily with a fork.
- Cook eggs until the white and yolk are firm.

Safe Storage

- Keep your refrigerator temperature at 40-45° F and your freezer at 0° F.
- Refrigerate leftovers as soon as possible. Divide large portions into small bags or containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Do not leave perishable cooked food at room temperature longer than two hours.
- Remove stuffing from poultry and meat and refrigerate it in separate containers.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

Storage Suggestions for Most Common Foods:

Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Fresh meats	3 to 5 days	4 to 12 months
Ground meats	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months
Poultry	1 to 2 days	9 to 12 months
Lunch meats	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months
Fish	1 to 2 days	4 to 6 months
Eggs	3 to 5 weeks	
Milk	5 days beyond date on carton	1 month
Cheese	3 to 4 weeks	

For More Information

For more information call the FDA's Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Hotline at 1-800-FDA-4010 or view its website at www.fda.gov. You may also call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555 or view its website at www.usda.gov.

If You Have Further Questions, Call:



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