

Food Safety



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10 Dangerous Food Safety Mistakes

We all want to keep our families safe and healthy. But sometimes a simple mistake in how we handle and prepare food can lead to serious sickness. With some germs like *Salmonella*, just a small amount in undercooked food is enough to cause food poisoning. And just a tiny taste of food with botulism toxin can cause paralysis and even death.

You can protect your family by avoiding these mistakes.



Mistake #1: Not cooking meat, chicken, turkey, seafood, or eggs thoroughly



Why It's a Mistake: Undercooked foods may have germs that can make you sick.



Solution: Use a food thermometer to make sure you cook food to a safe internal temperature.

Get a [detailed list](#) of foods and safe temperatures. Also, if you won't be serving hot food right away, keep it hot (at 140°F or above) until serving.

Cook Meat and Eggs to Safe Internal Temperatures

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety



145°F



Pork Roast

Rack of Lamb



Beef Brisket

After cooking, let meat rest for 3 minutes before serving.

145°F



Fish Fillet

160°F



Ground Beef



Egg Dish

165°F



Ground Turkey

Turkey



Chicken



Leftovers

CS20043

Mistake #2: Eating raw batter or dough, including cookie dough, and other foods with uncooked eggs or uncooked flour



Why It's a Mistake: Uncooked flour and eggs may contain *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, or other harmful bacteria.



Solution: Cook or bake flour and eggs thoroughly. Don't eat foods that contain raw or undercooked eggs, such as runny eggs, homemade mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, and eggnog. Don't eat raw (uncooked) dough or batter that contains flour or eggs. Keep raw dough away from children, including play dough. Wash hands, work surfaces, and utensils thoroughly after contact with flour, raw eggs, and raw dough.

Mistake #3: Thawing or marinating food on the counter



Why It's a Mistake: Harmful germs can multiply very quickly at room temperature.

Solution: [Thaw food safely](#). You can thaw it:



- In the refrigerator,
- In cold water, or
- In the microwave.

Always marinate food in the refrigerator no matter what kind of marinade you're using.

Mistake #4: Leaving food out too long before putting it in the fridge



Why It's a Mistake: Harmful germs can grow in perishable foods (including meat, chicken, turkey, seafood, eggs, cut fruit, cooked rice, and leftovers) if you leave them out of the refrigerator 2 hours or longer.



Solution: Put perishable foods in the refrigerator within 2 hours [🔗](#) or within 1 hour if the food is exposed to a temperature over 90°F (like in a hot car). Divide roasts and large portions of food, such as pots of stew or chili, into smaller containers so they will chill quickly. It's OK to put warm or hot food into the refrigerator, as long as it's packaged in amounts small enough cool quickly.

Mistake #5: Peeling fruits and vegetables without washing them first



Why It's a Mistake: Fruits and vegetables may have germs on their peeling or skin. It's easy to transfer those germs to the inside of fruits and vegetables when you cut or peel them.



Solution: Wash all fruits and vegetables under running water even if you're going to peel them. Use a clean vegetable brush to scrub firm fruits and vegetables like melons, avocados, and cucumbers. Washing fruits and vegetables with soap, detergent, or commercial produce wash is not recommended. Do not use bleach solutions or other disinfecting products on fruits and vegetables.

Mistake #6: Not washing your hands



Why It's a Mistake: Germs on your hands can get on food and make it unsafe.



Solution: Wash hands the right way—for at least 20 seconds with soap and running water. Wash hands before, during, and after preparing food; before eating; and after using the toilet or changing a child's diaper.

Mistake #7: Eating risky foods if you are more likely to get food poisoning

Why It's a Mistake: Anyone can get food poisoning. But some people are more likely to get sick and to have a more serious illness. This includes:



- Adults aged 65 and older
- Children younger than 5 years
- People who have health problems or who take medicines that lower the body's ability to fight germs and sickness (weakened immune systems)
- Pregnant women



Solution: People who are more likely to get food poisoning should not eat:

- Undercooked or raw animal products (such as meat, chicken, turkey, eggs, or seafood)
- Raw or lightly cooked sprouts
- Unpasteurized (raw) milk and juices
- Soft cheese (such as queso fresco), unless it is labeled as made with pasteurized milk

Learn the [best ways to protect yourself from food poisoning](#) at home or in restaurants.

People with a higher risk of FOOD POISONING



Adults aged 65
and older



Children younger than
5 years



People with weakened
immune systems



Pregnant women

Choose and prepare food carefully to help prevent food poisoning.

Mistake #8: Putting cooked meat back on a plate that held raw meat



Why It's a Mistake: Germs from the raw meat can spread to the cooked meat.



Solution: Always use [separate plates](#) for raw meat and cooked meat. The same rule applies to chicken, turkey, and seafood.

Mistake #9: Tasting or smelling food to see if it's still good



Why It's a Mistake: You can't taste, smell, or see the germs that cause food poisoning. Tasting only a tiny amount can make you very sick.



Solution: Check the [storage times chart](#) [↗](#) to see how long you can store food safely. When the time is up, throw it out.

Mistake #10: Washing meat, chicken, or turkey



Why It's a Mistake: Washing raw meat, chicken, turkey, or eggs can spread germs to your sink, countertops, and other surfaces in your kitchen. Those germs can get on other foods, like salads or fruit, and make you sick.



Solution: Don't wash meat, [chicken](#), turkey, or eggs. Cooking them thoroughly will kill harmful germs.

More Information

- [Food Poisoning Symptoms](#)
- [People With a Higher Risk of Food Poisoning](#)
- [Foods That Can Cause Food Poisoning](#)

Report Food Poisoning



If you think you or someone you know got sick from food, please [report it to your local health department](#). Report it even if you don't know what food made you sick. Reporting an illness can help public health officials identify a foodborne disease outbreak and keep others from getting sick.

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