Your Health: How to Prevent Food Poisoning

What is food poisoning?
Foods that contain harmful germs can cause food poisoning. The germs can get into the food while it is growing, during processing, or during preparation. You may get sick after you eat undercooked meat, eggs, or other unsafe foods. You can prevent most cases of food poisoning by being careful when you prepare and store food. The following steps can help prevent food poisoning (adapted from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

Serve foods safely
- Keep hot foods hot (140°F [60°C] or above) and cold foods cold (40°F [4.4°C] or below).
- Never leave meat, poultry, eggs, fish, or shellfish (raw or cooked) at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour in hot weather).
- Chill leftovers as soon as you finish eating.
- Store leftovers in small, shallow containers to cool rapidly.
- Do not reheat food that has not been stored or handled properly. Reheating does not make contaminated food safe.
- If you are not sure how long a food has been in the refrigerator, throw it out.
- If you are not sure whether a food is safe, throw it out.

When you eat out, be sure that meat is cooked thoroughly. And make sure that foods that ought to be refrigerated (such as puddings and cold cuts) are served cold. Also pay attention to how the restaurant looks. If the tables, dinnerware, and restrooms look dirty, the kitchen may be dirty too.

Prepare foods safely
- Keep raw meat, poultry, eggs, fish, and shellfish away from other foods, surfaces, utensils, and serving plates.
- Use one cutting board only for raw meats, poultry, and fish, and do not use it for any other foods.
- After you cut raw meats, wash your cutting board with hot, soapy water and disinfect it with a bleach solution. Use 1 teaspoon of bleach per 1 quart (32 fl oz) of water, or use

Wash your hands
Wash your hands thoroughly and often.
- Before you handle foods or utensils, wash your hands with soapy water.
- After you handle or prepare foods, wash your hands and utensils, especially after they touch raw meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or eggs.
- Always wash your hands after you use the bathroom; change diapers; handle garbage; use the phone; shake hands; play with pets; smoke cigarettes; or touch your hair, face, or clothing.
a commercial cleaner with bleach according to the label directions. Replace cutting boards as soon as they become worn or develop hard-to-clean grooves.

- Keep kitchen surfaces clean with hot, soapy water. Wash dishcloths and towels often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables under running water before you eat them.
- Marinate foods in a covered dish in the refrigerator, not on the counter.
- Never thaw frozen meat, poultry, fish, and shellfish at room temperature. Thaw in the refrigerator or microwave. If you thaw food in the refrigerator, be sure juices do not drip onto other food. Place these foods on the lowest shelf, never above ready-to-eat foods.
- Cook food immediately after you thaw it.

Cook foods safely

- Use a clean meat thermometer to determine whether meat, poultry, or egg dishes are cooked to a safe temperature.
- Bring sauces, gravies, and soups to a boil when reheating. Reheat other leftovers to at least 165°F (74°C).
- When using a microwave oven, cover the food container, and turn or stir the food to make sure it is heated evenly throughout. If the microwave does not have a turntable, rotate the dish once or twice by hand during cooking.
- Cook eggs until whites and yolks are firm.
- Do not eat raw or partially cooked eggs (including cookie dough), raw (unpasteurized) milk, cheeses made with raw milk, or unpasteurized juices.
- Do not eat undercooked hamburger, the main source of *E. coli* infection.
- Be aware of the risk of food poisoning from raw fish (including sushi), clams, and oysters. Cook fish and shellfish until it flakes easily with a fork.
- When you eat out, make sure foods are thoroughly cooked and are served hot.

Follow food labels

Food packaging labels provide information about when to use the food and how to store it. Reading food labels and following safety instructions will greatly reduce your chance of becoming ill with food poisoning. These labels include the following guidelines:

- **Sell by.** This tells the store how long to display the product. You should not buy the product after this date.
- **Best if used by.** This tells you how long the product keeps its best flavor or quality. This date is not a purchase or safety date.
- **Use by.** This tells you the last date that is recommended for using the product while at peak quality. The manufacturer determines this date.

Printed dates or numbers on labels without an identifier (such as “sell by”) generally represent packing numbers used by the manufacturer to track inventory or locate a product. These dates do not indicate freshness or quality of the product. You may also see instructions on the label, such as:

- Refrigerate after opening.
- Keep refrigerated or frozen.
- Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.