

## Safe Food Tips

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### Why is food safety important?

We are surrounded by food every day so it's easy to forget food can also be potentially very dangerous if it's not handled and prepared correctly.

Bacteria can multiply in food, and make us extremely ill - more than five million Australians suffer from food-borne illness each year, and up to one million Australians became ill because of incorrect handling, storage and preparation. (*Source: Food Safety Information Council*).

Fortunately you can eliminate a lot of the risk if you follow some simple, commonsense tips.

### How can I make sure my food is safe?

#### 1. Temperature Control

The bacteria that commonly cause food poisoning grow rapidly between 5°C and 60°C, this is commonly referred to as the "temperature danger zone". To keep food safe:

- Don't leave perishable foods in the temperature danger zone for longer than 2 hours.
- Keep cold food in a fridge, freezer or esky, below 5°C until you are ready to cook or serve, eg if you are serving salads keep them in the fridge until ready to serve.
- Keep hot food in an oven or on a stove, above 60°C until you are ready to serve.
- Refrigerate leftovers as soon as possible, within 2 hours. If reheating leftovers, reheat to steaming hot.
- Never defrost foods on the bench top. Foods should be defrosted overnight in the fridge or in the microwave.

#### 2. Cook foods thoroughly

Raw foods, such as meat and poultry, can contain bacteria which may cause food poisoning. Fortunately these bugs are killed through correct cooking:

- Make sure food is cooked thoroughly before serving. Cook poultry, minced meats, and sausages until well done, right through to the centre. No pink should be left visible.
- Whole pieces of red meat, such as steak, can be cooked to taste.

#### 3. Prevent cross contamination of food

Bacteria can spread if raw meat and poultry touches (or drips onto) ready-to-eat foods. This is dangerous because the ready-to-eat foods, such as salad vegetables, often receive no further cooking and the bacteria are not killed.

To avoid cross contamination:

- Separate raw and cooked food.
- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly after touching raw meat and chicken.
- Thoroughly clean all utensils, equipment and surfaces after preparing raw food and before contact with other foods. If possible use a separate cutting board specifically for raw meat and chicken.
- Store raw meat and chicken at the bottom of the fridge so it can't drip onto other foods.

#### 4. Personal hygiene

People and pets also carry bacteria. If we are not careful this bacteria can spread to food and make us sick.

- Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly before touching food, especially after using the toilet, blowing your nose or touching a pet.
- Don't prepare food for yourself or others if you are ill, especially if suffering from diarrhoea.
- Keep pets and animals out of the kitchen.

#### Other good tips

- Use a thermometer to make sure your fridge is below 5°C. Don't overload refrigerators, as this reduces cooling efficiency.
- Keep an esky in your car to keep perishables, especially raw meat and poultry, cold after shopping.
- Remember the "2-hour rule" when entertaining with a large meal or buffet. Don't let perishable foods linger for longer than two hours in the danger zone.