

Food Safety for Summertime

The number of people who get sick from food poisoning goes up in the summer. Be sure you and your family aren't among them. During summertime, bacteria flourish. Heat, humidity and often the lack of a sanitized environment all contribute to food poisoning. So it's more important than ever to be careful when preparing and cooking foods.

Wash your hands often, especially before handling food and after using the restroom.

Use hot, soapy water and scrub well. It's the friction that cleans your hands! When you're eating away from home, be sure to pack disposable washcloths and paper towels for cleaning hands and surfaces.

Prevent cross contamination.

Remember to separate your foods and wrap raw meats securely. Always wash the plates or cutting boards that held the raw meat before using it again for cooked food. When you're packing the cooler, wrap raw meats securely to avoid their juices coming in contact with ready-to-eat foods. Cross-contamination is a prime cause of illness.

Wash your fruits and vegetables.

You've probably heard how important it is to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, but did you know it's equally important to wash those fruits and veggies? Because of the large number of people who will handle produce before you buy it, it's important to clean them before eating. First soak your fruit or vegetable in a clean container in cold water for several minutes. Use a brush to scrub the surface if necessary. Then place the food in a colander and rinse thoroughly under running water. Blot them dry with a paper towel.

Cook safely.

Cooking meat and poultry kills harmful bacteria so always cook your meats to proper temperatures. Don't be deceived by the browning of the meat. Use a meat thermometer to be sure. Cook hamburger to at least 160 degrees (Fahrenheit) and cook chicken and turkey to 180 degrees. Consider using ground beef treated with irradiation for an extra measure of safety.

Store food safely.

Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Keep your refrigerator temperature below 41 degrees F. When serving foods don't leave them out more than 2 hours. Cool leftovers as soon as possible and reheat them to 165 degrees F.

