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Microbe Foiled Again

Recipe for success: Prepare & serve food safely

Mike the Microbe and his pals help us learn how to prepare and serve safe food.

Safe Food for Children
A series of lessons for parents & child care providers
Lesson 3

Lesson 3

You can be a safe cook

Most of us think our food is safe to eat. Usually it is. But sometimes food can become infected with microbes. When we eat it, we can get sick.

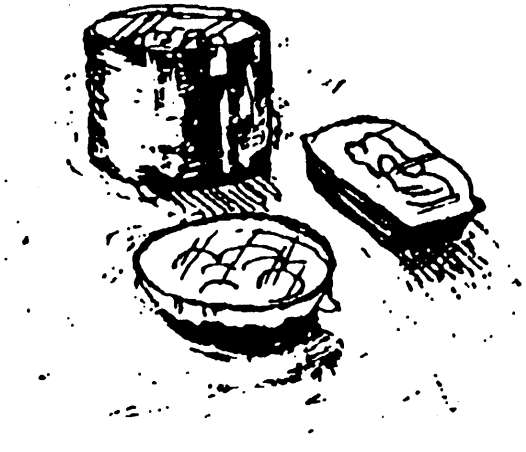
While you prepare and serve foods, you can take many precautions to keep them safe so that they do not cause sicknesses. Two ways to stop food-borne illnesses are proper cooking and cooling.

Remember these three easy, safe food rules:

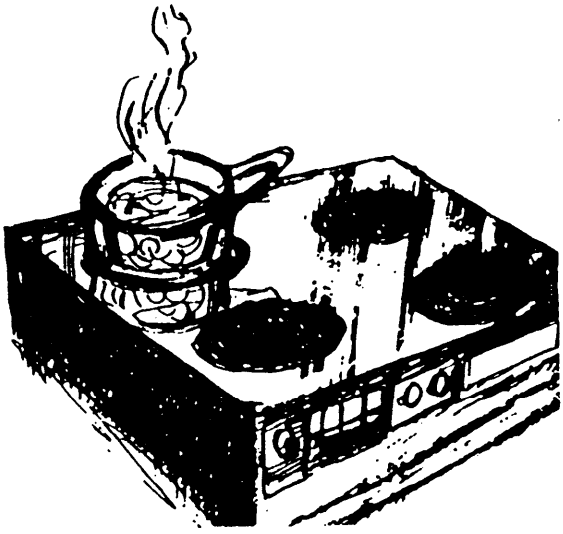
> Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

> Thoroughly cook meat, fish, poultry, and eggs.

> Keep equipment, hands, and food clean.



Store and marinate food in airtight containers or wrap up to prevent cross-contamination.



Keep hot foods hot and cook completely.

Prepare food properly

Follow these steps to protect uncooked food.

Do not thaw food at room temperature. Instead, thaw in the refrigerator, It can also be thawed in a microwave oven, but cook it right afterward. If poultry is in a sealed plastic bag, it can be placed in cold water which should be changed every 30 minutes.

Do not taste any raw or partially cooked animal products.

Do not let juices from uncooked meat, poultry or fish touch any other foods.

Marinate raw products in the refrigerator, not on a counter. Do not reuse marinade. Throw it out.

After touching or handling raw meat, fish or poultry, wash hands and equipment thoroughly before preparing other food. Best bet: dry off with paper towels instead of cloth towels.

Cook the smart way

Learn how to cook food completely. Be sure hot foods are hot, not lukewarm.

Use a meat thermometer to judge the safe internal temperature of meat and poultry more than 2 inches thick. Beef, pork, fish and eggs should be at least 160° F and poultry 180° F.

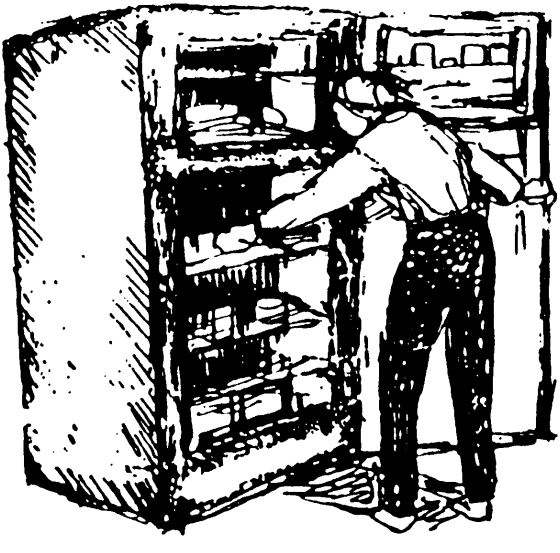
Meat or poultry less than 2 inches thick are done when juices are clear and the center is not pink or rare.

Fish is done with it flakes with a fork.

Never partly cook food to finish grilling or roasting later.

Salmonella, a bacteria that causes food poisoning, likes to grow inside fresh, unbroken eggs. To avoid salmonella, cook fresh eggs completely, or use prepackaged pasteurized eggs. Eat whole eggs only when yolks are cooked solid and not runny.

Generally, cook frozen foods longer than thawed foods — usually 1½ times longer.

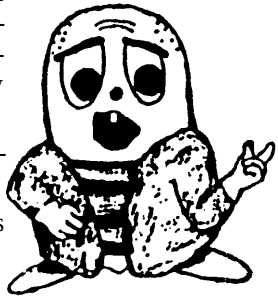


Keep cold foods cold

Serve it safe

Be sure you serve food safely. Here are some ways to do so:

Serve cooked foods on clean plates with clean utensils. Never put food on unclean plates used for raw foods.



Keep hot foods at a temperature above 140°F.

When the temperature is 85° F or warmer, cooked foods should be out for no longer than one hour. Otherwise, do not leave them out for more than two hours.

Special microwave tips

A microwave oven can help cook food quickly. But it has a food safety disadvantage. It sometimes leaves cold spots in food where microbes may survive. To cook food thoroughly in a microwave oven:

- Cover food with lids or wax paper so steam can complete the cooking.
- Help food cook evenly. Use a rotating microwave pad or stop cooking often to rotate dishes and stir foods.
- Follow recipe standing times before serving.
- Check food for doneness with a temperature probe or thermometer. Insert at several spots.
- Cut foods into the same in size and shape to cook more evenly.

What is a foodborne illness?

Most of the two million U.S. cases of foodborne illnesses are caused by careless or improper food handling at home. What we often think is the flu — upset stomach, nausea, stomach cramps, and runny stools — may be caused by eating food with harmful microbes or the poisons they produce. Infected food may show no signs of spoilage.

There is a difference between microbes that cause food to spoil — to rot or turn bad —and those that cause illness. Food spoilage microbes that can cause a change in color or an "off smell" do not cause foodborne illness. Improperly handled food can contain both kinds of microbes. Meat, milk, or eggs are the foods most often involved in foodborne illness.

Microbe Foiled Again/ Recipe for success: Prepare & serve food safely is the third in a five-part program on *Safe Food for Children: A series of lessons for parents and child care providers.*

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