

Food Safety

Practicing proper food safety techniques is an important part of eating healthy. Adults 65 and older are at a greater risk for foodborne illness. Use these simple steps to practice safe eating habits.

Clean

Washing hands and surfaces helps prevent foodborne illness. Wash your hands with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to adequately lather and scrub your hands well, especially the back of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails where bacteria can hide. Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot, soapy water after each use. Dry with a cloth. Before cooking or eating, rinse your fruits and vegetables under running water, but do not use soap or other products and do not wash meat, poultry or eggs.

Separate

Keeping foods separate at each stage of preparation helps avoid cross-contamination. Use different cutting boards and utensils for produce and meat (beef, poultry, seafood and eggs). When storing foods at home be sure to keep raw seafood, meat and poultry on a bottom shelf in your refrigerator. Follow the storage instructions on the Food Storage Timetable on the back of this fact sheet.

Cook

The bacteria that causes food poisoning multiplies quickest in the “danger zone” between 40–140 degrees Fahrenheit (F), so it’s important to prepare foods to the right temperature (such as 165 for poultry, 160 for ground meat, and 145 for beef and seafood). Use a thermometer to check that foods are cooked to the right temperature, keep foods at 140 or hotter after completely cooking and microwave leftovers thoroughly to 165.

Chill

Bacteria can grow in perishable foods within two hours, so be sure to refrigerate these items, including all cut, peeled or cooked fresh fruits and vegetables, within two hours of preparing. Keep your refrigerator at or below 40 F. Also, be sure to throw away any food that has reached its expiration date or has touched raw meat, poultry, seafood or uncooked eggs.

Table 1: Food Storage Timetable

Food	Refrigerator	Pantry	Freezer	Special Handling
Apples*	1 month			
Bananas*		2–3 days	2–3 months	Store in the pantry until ripe and refrigerate after ripe.
Breads		2–4 days	2–3 months	Homemade breads have shorter shelf life due to lack of preservatives.
Broccoli	5 days			
Butter	2–3 weeks		6–9 months	Wrap or cover tightly.
Chicken Whole Pieces	1–2 days 1–2 days		12 months 6–9 months	Store in the coldest part of refrigerator (32–38 degrees). Do not let raw juices drip onto other foods. For the freezer, use moisture and vapor proof wrap.
Eggs (fresh)	3–4 weeks			Store eggs in the original carton in the coldest part of refrigerator.
Fish Fatty Lean	1–2 days 1–2 days		2–3 months 6 months	For the refrigerator, keep wrapped in the original wrap and store in the coldest part. For the freezer, use moisture and vapor proof wrap.
Fruit (canned)	1 week opened	12 months unopened		
Green beans (fresh)	3–4 days			
Grapes*	5 days			
Lettuce	5–7 days			
Meat Ground Steak	1–2 days 3–5 days		2–3 months 4–6 months	Store in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Do not let raw juices drip onto other foods. For the freezer, use moisture and vapor proof wrap.
Milk	1 week		1 month	Keep tightly covered. Don't return to the original container. This may spread bacteria to remaining milk. Frozen milk may undergo some quality change.
Mushrooms	1–2 days			Do not wash before refrigerating. Do not store in an airtight container.
Onions Dry Green	5 days	2–4 weeks		
Peppers Bell Chili	3–4 days 7–10 days		6 months	Keep chili peppers refrigerated in a bag.
Potatoes (fresh)		1 week		Do not refrigerate fresh potatoes. Store in a dark, dry place.
Salsa Opened Unopened	1–2 months	12–18 months		Fresh salsa has a shorter refrigerator storage time depending upon ingredients (4–7 days).
Tomatoes (fresh)	2–3 days			
Tortillas	2 weeks	1–2 weeks		This may vary depending upon ingredients. Check labels.

*Do not wash fruit before storing — *moisture encourages spoiling* — do wash before eating.