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Research and Extension

Cook and Store Food at a Safe Temperature

Food-related illness is something we all want to avoid. If you are one of the unlucky ones, you know why; if you have not experienced it then you want to keep it that way, trust me. One in six Americans will get a food-related illness this year. So how do we avoid it? Today I want to share some basic food safety information, along with a food temperature chart so you have the information all in one place.

What makes us sick? Bacteria such as E. Coli or Salmonella can live on our food. If food is not cooked to or kept at the right temperature, those bacteria multiply and make us sick. Both the temperature you cook the food to and the temperature you store it at are key for avoiding food-related illness.

Cooking to the right temperature

To destroy harmful bacteria you need to cook your food. One of my favorite lean proteins is chicken breast. My mom always said chicken is safe to eat so long as it is not pink. Unfortunately, you can't rely on color to measure doneness. You need a food thermometer! According to the USDA, to use a food thermometer you:

- Place the food thermometer in the thickest part of the food.
- It should not touch bone, fat, or gristle.
- Be sure to clean your food thermometer with hot soapy water before and after each use.

Chicken (and other poultry like turkey, duck, or goose) needs to be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 °F. Dishes with eggs and ground beef need to reach 160 °F to be safe to eat. Finally, steaks, roasts, fish, and chops should be cooked to 145 °F. That is a lot to remember, so here is a tip – if unsure, just cook things to 165 °F since that is a safe temperature for everything.

Serving and storing your food

Once it's cooked, what temperature should you store food at? Hot food should be kept above 135 °F, and cold food should be kept below 41 °F. If food is left out for longer than two hours between 41 °F and 135 °F, the bacteria can multiply to a harmful level. Hint – that is room

temperature, so after two hours out on a counter or table, food is potentially unsafe. When you are ready to put away leftovers after cooking, food needs to be stored below 40 °F in the refrigerator and 0 °F in your freezer.

Remember, the best way to avoid getting sick from food is by making sure it is cooked to and stored at the correct temperatures. Below is a chart to keep all the information handy.

Recommended Internal Temperatures*	
Food	**°F**
Ground Meat and Meat Mixtures	
Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb	160
Turkey, Chicken	165
Fresh Beef, Pork, Lamb & Veal	
Beef, Pork, Veal, & Lamb (steaks, roasts and chops)	145**
**as measured with a food thermometer before removing meat from the heat source. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat to higher temperatures.	
Ham	
Fresh (raw)	145**
Pre-cooked (to reheat)	140
Poultry	
Chicken, Turkey, Duck & Goose (whole or pieces)	165
Poultry breast, roast	165
Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)	165
Eggs and Egg Dishes	
Eggs	Cook until yolk and white are firm
Egg dishes	160
Leftovers and Casseroles	165

Source: https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/d8151061-bb50-46db-b87e-a3b9022c0c56/Kitchen_Thermometers.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

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