

# Practice food safety



Maintain food safety when cooking or dining outdoors.

Warmer temperatures lead to an increase in outdoor dining. Grill-masters anxiously wait to show off their skills while guests gravitate around the barbecue in the backyard.

No matter the temperature outside or the size of the crowd around your dinner table, food safety is a concern whenever foods will be transported inside and outdoors or enjoyed in the fresh air.

A survey conducted by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that, while most people realize the months of May through September are prime times for the threat of food poisoning, consumers still are not practicing correct outdoor food safety procedures. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says there are around 76 million cases of foodborne illnesses each year in the United States alone. Those involve hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths. The CDC warns that people need to be even more diligent during warmer months to prevent food-related illnesses.

## Food safety starts at the store

Food can spoil even before making its way into your kitchen. When food shopping, put the cold and frozen items on your list in your cart last. This will help keep them fresher longer.

Always use plastic bags to protect other foods against raw meat or poultry juices that can leak. Bag these items together at checkout so that you'll know to immediately put all of the perishable items away when you get home.

Some people invest in insulated, reusable tote bags that can keep cold food cold on the ride home. Even if you use such bags, always head directly home after food shopping; do not stop along the way and leave food in a warm car where it can quickly spoil.

## Safety around the grill

**Preparing foods** involves avoiding cross-contamination between uncooked and cooked foods. That means switching utensils so that bacteria will not transfer from un-

cooked or partially cooked food to fully cooked food.

Use a cooler to keep refrigerated foods cold until it's time to put them on the grill if you're cooking away from home, such as at a public picnic site. Otherwise, wait until the grill is hot and ready before bringing out foods that need to be cooked.

Rely on a cooking thermometer to test the internal temperature of foods to ensure they reach temperatures that will kill bacteria or other pathogens. Hamburgers should reach 160 F and chicken breasts 165 F. When reheating fully cooked meats like hot dogs, grill to 165 F, or until steaming hot.

Discard any unused marinades so that they do not contaminate cooked foods.

## Outdoor buffet tips

Food also needs to be protected once it is served. Use ice or coolers to keep cold salads and condiments at at least 40 F. Foods should not remain outside in hot weather of 90 F or above for more than one hour. The maximum time food should be kept sitting out is two hours, says the USDA.

Keep hands and utensils clean at all times. This way you do not transfer any germs onto safe foods. If a fresh water source is unavailable, keep hand wipes or disinfecting gels at the ready to clean up before eating.

## Clean up well

Promptly clean all serving platters, utensils and cutting boards if they have been in contact with raw food juices. The FDA even recommends that you sanitize your cutting board with chlorine bleach, and replace it if the surface gets worn and difficult to clean.

Outdoor cooking and dining are quite popular. Following safety precautions can go a long way toward preventing foodborne illnesses.

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