



Safe Food Handling and Meal Preparation Training

Safe food preparation means avoiding the spread of bacteria right from the time you buy foods to preparing and storing food items. Handling food safely helps you protect the individuals you support from becoming victim of food related illnesses.

Fortunately, most healthy people will recover from a food-borne illness fairly quickly, while others may develop serious health problems which include prolonged diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, with a danger of becoming severely dehydrated.

However, some of the people we support, like older adults, young children, and those with low immunity, have a much higher risk of falling prey to food-borne diseases.

Here are some common bacteria in contaminated foods which cause the most trouble.

- Salmonella is one of the most common forms of bacteria to cause food poisoning infecting the intestinal tract. Most people recover in 3 to 4 days without treatment. It can be present in undercooked meat, poultry, raw eggs, and egg products.
- E-coli is found in undercooked ground beef, raw milk products like soft cheeses, some raw fruit, and raw veggies such as sprouts. Symptoms include violent stomach cramps, and severe diarrhea which may lead to bloody stools.
- Listeria, unlike other bacteria, can actually grow in cold temperatures like the fridge. It can be present in refrigerated meat spreads, ready-to-eat deli meats, raw milk, and raw sprouts. You could be troubled by fever, muscle pains, nausea, and a flu-like illness.

Food that is not prepared safely may contain these types of bacteria and unsafe food spreads food related illnesses and infections. Fortunately, you can prevent food related illnesses by handling food safely when preparing and storing food items.

Follow these guidelines for safe food handling and meal preparation:

1. Wash Your Hands Before Preparation of Food

The first thing you need to do before meal preparation is to wash your hands properly and thoroughly. Hands are one of the major sources of spreading germs. It is very important that you wash your hands after using the toilet, before cooking and eating. Always wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, and dry them with a clean towel or paper towel before handling utensils and preparing foods. During meal preparation, wash hands after handling raw meat, poultry, and eggs, to avoid cross contamination with food and surfaces.

2. Keep Kitchen Clean and Hygienically Safe

Another important part of food preparation is cleaning. It is not just that you wash your hands but you need to maintain cleanliness in the kitchen and keep your utensils clean as well. Cooked, prepared foods, or foods served raw (e.g., vegetables) should come in contact only with clean and sanitized surfaces, equipment, and utensils. Equipment used for raw foods should be washed and sanitized before being used with cooked foods.

3. Handling Fruits and Vegetables

Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with plain running water so that all germs, pesticides and dirt get washed away. A vegetable brush may also be used to scrub firm produce. Do not cut or prepare fruit and vegetables on the counter, use a cutting board. When preparing food, use one cutting board for fresh produce, and another for meat, fish or poultry products to avoid contamination.

4. Handling and Cooking Meat, Poultry and Eggs

One effective way to prevent food-borne illness is to cook food to the proper internal temperature. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry and egg dishes check for doneness. Here are a few basic temps:

Food	Internal Temperature
Beef (Ground)	160°F
Chicken or Turkey (Ground)	165°F
Beef, Veal & Lamb (Roasts, Chops, Steaks)	160-170°F
Pork	160°F
Chicken and Turkey Breasts	170°F
Chicken or Turkey (legs, thighs & wings)	180°F

If a thermometer is not available, you can use visual signs of doneness:

- Steam rises from food
- Clear juices run from meat and poultry, not pink
- Pork, veal and poultry are white inside, not pink or red
- Shellfish is opaque and fish flakes easily with a fork
- Egg yolks are firm, not runny, and egg whites are opaque

5. Food Storage and Reheating

How food is stored is just as important as how it's cooked for preventing food-borne illness. Store food immediately, in shallow, airtight containers and refrigerate promptly and at a proper temperature (40 degrees or lower) for rapid cooling. Bacteria starts growing and multiplying once you have taken it off the heat. Food left out at room temperature for more than two hours, or one hour at temperatures above 90 degrees, should be discarded. Use any cooked leftovers within four days. When in doubt, throw it out. When reheating leftover food whether it is in the microwave or on the stove, heat to 165 degrees.

Keep the above guidelines in mind while preparing and serving food for the individuals you support. You should also keep in mind that the process of cooking of food is as important as the preparation and storing of foods. Food poisoning or infection of any food related illness is possible when food is not properly cooked or contamination occurs. Persons with communicable diseases(such as colds), diarrhea, infected wounds on the hands and arms, or boils should not be allowed to prepare food. Additionally, food handlers should not eat while preparing food to prevent cross contamination.