

# Preventing food poisoning

Good hygiene at home



FOOD  
STANDARDS  
AGENCY

There are four main things to remember for good food hygiene – we've called them the 4 Cs. You should think about them whenever you're in the kitchen.

## The 4 Cs

1 cleaning 2 cooking 3 chilling 4 cross-contamination

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### 1 Cleaning

You can prevent the spread of harmful bacteria by observing good personal hygiene and keeping work surfaces and utensils clean.

It's important to wash your hands regularly, especially:

- after visiting the toilet
- after handling raw foods
- before touching ready-to-eat food


And remember:

- don't handle food when you are ill with stomach problems, such as diarrhoea or vomiting
  - don't touch food if you have sores or cuts, unless they are covered with a waterproof dressing
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### 2 Cooking

Proper cooking kills food poisoning bacteria such as listeria, salmonella, *E. coli* O157 and campylobacter. It's important to cook food thoroughly, especially meat. Make sure that food is cooked right through and piping hot in the middle.

When reheating food make sure it's piping hot all the way through and don't reheat it more than once.



## 3 Chilling

It's very important to keep certain foods at the right temperature to prevent bacteria growing or toxins forming. Always look at the label on the packaging. If it says that the food needs to be refrigerated, make sure you keep it in the fridge.

If food that needs to be chilled is left standing at room temperature, food poisoning bacteria can grow and multiply to dangerous levels. Cooked leftovers should be cooled quickly and then put in the fridge. Putting food in shallow containers and dividing it into smaller amounts will speed up the cooling process.

## 4 Cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is the transfer of bacteria from foods (usually raw) to other foods. The bacteria can be transferred directly when one food touches (or drips onto) another, or indirectly, for example from hands, equipment, work surfaces, or knives and other utensils. Cross-contamination is one of the major causes of food poisoning.

To prevent cross-contamination:

- always wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw food
- keep raw and ready-to-eat foods separate
- store raw meat in sealable containers at the bottom of the fridge, so it can't drip onto other foods
- use different chopping boards/work surfaces for raw food and ready-to-eat food
- clean knives and other utensils thoroughly after use with raw food



### Why is it important to report food poisoning?

If you think your illness has been caused by food from a restaurant or other food business, the local environmental health department needs to know so it can investigate the business in question. If the environmental health officers find a problem with the business's food hygiene practices, and get the business to improve them, this could help prevent other people suffering from food poisoning.

For further information and advice about food,  
visit the Food Standards Agency's websites:

[eatwell.gov.uk](http://eatwell.gov.uk)

[food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk)

[salt.gov.uk](http://salt.gov.uk)

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