

10 Commandments of Food Safety

By [EatingWell Editors](#)

- How many of these food-safety rules do you follow?



Every year 76 million Americans get sick from food, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Nothing you can do will ever guarantee 100 percent protection against foodborne illness, but there are some simple precautions that help to reduce your risk. Below are our “10 Commandments of Food Safety”—basically the advice that we keep hearing again and again from food-safety experts. How many do you follow?

1. Use a “refrigerator thermometer” to keep your food stored at a safe temperature (below 40°F).

Cold temperatures slow the growth of bacteria. Ensuring that your refrigerator temperature stays at 40°F or colder is one of the most effective ways to reduce your risk of foodborne illness. You can buy a “refrigerator/freezer thermometer” at appliance stores, home centers (e.g., Home Depot) and kitchen stores—including online ones, such as [cooking.com](#).

2. Defrost food in the refrigerator, the microwave or in cold water, never on the counter.

Perishable foods should never be thawed on the counter for longer than 2 hours because, while the center of the food may remain frozen, the outer surface may enter the Danger Zone, the range of temperatures between 40° and 140°F, in which bacteria multiply rapidly. If you’re short on

time, use the microwave—or you can thaw meat and poultry in airtight packaging in cold water. Change the water every half hour (so it stays cold) and use the thawed food immediately.

3. Always use separate cutting boards for raw meat/poultry/fish and produce/cooked foods.

Bacteria from uncooked meat, poultry and fish can contaminate cooked foods and fresh produce. An important way to reduce this risk is to use separate cutting boards for raw meat/poultry/fish and produce/cooked foods.

4. Always cook meat to proper temperatures, using a calibrated instant-read thermometer to make sure.

One effective way to prevent illness is to use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry and egg dishes. The USDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures are as follows: beef, veal and lamb (steaks and roasts), fish, 145°F; pork and ground beef, 160°F; poultry, 165°F. In the EatingWell Test Kitchen we often recommend cooking meats like roasts and steaks to lower temperatures, closer to medium-rare, so that they retain their moisture. However, we recommend that those who are at high risk for developing foodborne illness—pregnant women and their unborn babies and newborns, young children, older adults, people with weakened immune systems or certain chronic illnesses—follow the USDA guidelines.

5. Avoid unpasteurized (“raw”) milk and cheeses made from unpasteurized milk that are aged less than 60 days.

Raw milk is milk from cows, sheep or goats that has not been pasteurized (heated to a very high temperature for a specific length of time) to kill harmful bacteria that may be present. These bacteria—which include salmonella, E. coli and listeria—can cause serious illness and sometimes even death. The bacteria in raw milk can be especially dangerous to pregnant women, children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. Raw-milk cheeses aged 60 days or longer are OK, since the salt and acidity of the cheesemaking process make for a hostile environment to pathogens.

6. Never eat “runny” eggs or foods, such as cookie dough, that contain raw eggs.

Even eggs that have clean, intact shells may be contaminated with salmonella, so it's important to cook eggs thoroughly until both the yolk and the white are firm. Casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 160°F (use an instant-read food thermometer to check). In the EatingWell Test Kitchen, we don't always recommend cooking eggs fully. However, we recommend that those who are at high risk for developing foodborne illness—pregnant women and their unborn babies and newborns, young children, older adults, people with weakened immune systems or certain chronic illnesses—follow the USDA guidelines. If you can't resist runny eggs—or sampling cookie batter—use pasteurized eggs. They're found near other eggs in large supermarkets.

7. Always wash your hands in warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling food and after touching raw meat, poultry or eggs.

You can pick up a lot of bacteria out in the world, so it's important to always wash your hands before you eat or prepare food. You should also wash your hands after touching any uncooked meat, poultry and fish or eggs, as bacteria from these foods can contaminate cooked foods and fresh produce. Use soap and warm water and wash thoroughly—for at least 20 seconds. 8. Always heat leftover foods to 165°F.

The USDA recommends heating all cooked leftovers to 165°F in order to kill all potentially dangerous bacteria.

9. Never eat meat, poultry, eggs or sliced fresh fruits and vegetables that have been left out for more than 2 hours (1 hour in temperatures hotter than 90°F).

If you leave perishable foods out of the refrigerator or freezer for more than 2 hours they may enter the Danger Zone—the unsafe temperatures between 40° and 140°F, in which bacteria multiply rapidly.

10. Whenever there's a food recall, check products stored at home to make sure they are safe.

You should discard any food that's been recalled because it's associated with the outbreak of a foodborne illness. But according to a survey conducted by Rutgers University during the fall of 2008, only about 60 percent of Americans search their homes for foods that have been recalled because of contamination.

For more information on food recalls, visit www.recalls.gov.