

Top Tips and Activities! Avoiding Food Poisoning



There are an estimated 850, 000 cases of food poisoning in the UK each year, caused by the ingestion of microorganisms or toxins in food, with symptoms ranging from nausea, stomach pains and headaches to, in more extreme (and thankfully rare) cases, paralysis and even death. In many cases, the incidence of food poisoning is preventable by following some simple hygiene procedures.

Cleaning

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly before, during and after food preparation, especially if cooking raw meat or poultry. Use antibacterial hand gel if washing is inconvenient.
- Clean equipment such as dishwashers, draining boards, can openers and microwaves frequently using an antibacterial cleanser.
- Tea towels create the perfect breeding ground for microbes. Use a clean, dry tea towel to dry dishes after washing, or let the dishes air dry.
- Use hot soapy water to clean dishes. Using rubber gloves allows for the use of hotter water.
- Clean dishcloths regularly by soaking overnight in hot water, washing up liquid and bleach. Lay them flat or hang them up to dry.
- Try to use different cloths for different jobs, for example use separate cloths for dishes and worktops. Alternatively, use paper towels to clean surfaces.
- Clean chopping boards well, as microbes can survive in any grooves created.
- Consider using different chopping boards for raw meat and ready to eat foods.
- Have separate towels for drying hands and drying dishes.
- Empty and clean the bin regularly using an antibacterial cleanser.
- Keep pets out of the kitchen and away from equipment.
- Clean plastic water bottles thoroughly with hot soapy water before re-using.
- Clean food and equipment storage areas regularly.
- Clean utensils properly to avoid cross contamination between foods (e.g. butter in jam).

Storage

- Return items to the fridge as soon as possible. Allowing the food to warm increases the chance of microbial growth in the food.
- Keep raw meat, fish, poultry and eggs well covered and store in the bottom of the fridge to avoid the risk of cross contamination.
- Cover and cool leftovers as soon as possible to reduce the risk of microbial growth.
- Allow leftovers to cool (ideally within 1-2 hours) before keeping them in the fridge.
- Don't keep leftovers more than 2 days and do not reheat more than once.
- Check the label for storage and cooking instructions. Some foods require different storage conditions after opening and must be used within a certain time period.
- Pay attention to use by dates! A use by date means that a food is not safe after the indicated date whereas, generally, a best before date means that the food will still be safe, but the quality of the product may be compromised (Eggs are the exception to this rule).
- Eggs can be stored at room temperature if they have not been previously chilled, once chilled they must remain chilled until cooking.
- Check that the fridge is between 0°C and 5°C at all times, the temperature may need to be adjusted if the fridge is full.
- Don't buy damaged or opened packets.



- If there are visible signs of microbial growth (such as mould or bacteria colonies) the food is no longer safe to eat, regardless of the use by date.
- Mould spores are invisible so even if the visible mould is removed, there may still be spores throughout the food.

Preparation

- Rinse fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating them.
- Make sure meat is cooked through. Some meats such as beef or lamb can be served rare; however foods such as pork, offal, poultry, mince, burgers or sausages should always be cooked thoroughly. To check, cut the food open and make sure the food is steaming hot in the middle.
- If reheating food, make sure it is piping hot throughout.
- Defrost frozen food thoroughly in a container in the bottom of the fridge.
- If freezing fresh food, freeze before the use by date and consume within one or two days of defrosting.
- If barbequing, make sure the coals are glowing red with a powdery grey coating before cooking and turn foods regularly during cooking. Always check that the centre is steaming hot.