

**Title:**

Safe Food Handling For The Holidays

**Word Count:**

652

**Summary:**

Did you know that the turkey you thawed on the kitchen counter, instead of in the fridge, could now contain bacteria levels high enough to harm human life, even though you can't see, smell, or taste it?

There's nothing better than a home cooked meal during the holidays. But, with all the special effort that goes into making one, everything will be for naught if the food has not been stored, prepared, or cooked properly.

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**Keywords:**

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**Article Body:**

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There's nothing better than a home cooked meal during the holidays. But, with all the special effort that goes into making one, everything will be for naught if the food has not been stored, prepared, or cooked properly.

Food experts agree that the safe handling of food should be the top ingredient in any recipe.

While they may not turn you into a gourmet chef, following these simple food-handling tips will keep your family and guests safe from unpleasant, and sometimes life-threatening, food-born illnesses.

When buying raw meat, keep juices, which may contain bacteria, from contaminating your hands or anything in your grocery cart. Plastic bags work great for this purpose.

Meat should also be picked up at the end of your grocery shopping and should not

be placed in the same bag as fruits and vegetable.

If you plan on storing your meat for 2 to 3 months in the freezer, make sure you buy some freezer proof wrap. The wrap that the store uses is designed to allow air into the meat product and is, therefore, not good for freezing. This is because beef products turn from a purple color to a bright red when exposed to air, making them look fresh, but if left too long will promote bacteria growth.

Defrosting should be done in the refrigerator or in a sink full of water, changing the water about every 45 minutes. A refrigerator allows the meat to defrost in a controlled atmosphere, slowing down the growth of bacteria. Never defrost your meat on top of the counter at room temperature. This can quickly become a bacteria breeding ground. The growth rate of bacteria multiplies rapidly between 40F (4C) and 140F (60C).

Once meat has been thawed it must be either cooked immediately or placed in the refrigerator and then cooked within 24 hours. Never refreeze meat. Most meats and poultries only have a safe fridge life of 2 days, whether stored after thawing or purchased fresh.

When handling raw meat, wash your hands before and after. Also, wash counters or plates you plan to reuse in the preparation process if they have had raw meat on them, as they will also contain harmful levels of bacteria.

As humans, we also carry harmful organisms on our skin which, when spread to food, produce a toxin that normal cooking cannot destroy. Therefore, it is essential to wash our hands thoroughly with soap and water prior to handling food, as well as cover open cuts.

While beefsteak can be cooked to varying degrees of redness, turkey must be completely cooked. At the innermost part of the thigh, the temperature must reach 180F (82C) for a stuffed turkey and 170F (77C) unstuffed. Stuffing in the cavity should read 165F (74C). Cooking times vary with the weight of the bird.

It is important not to keep the thermometer inside the oven with the bird as it could be affected by the oven's hot air and provide a false reading.

Plan your cooking ahead of time. Do not partially cook the bird, refrigerate, and then complete the cooking process, as this will produce dangerously high levels of bacteria.

Cooked food must be refrigerated within 2 hours, which means that you need to plan your meal so that it can be eaten shortly after being cooked.

Refrigerated leftovers should be eaten within a couple of days, which includes turkey gravy, fish, and eggs. Meat casseroles and pies, rice, potatoes, and cooked noodles will last 2 to 3 days, while cooked meat, chicken, turkey, turkey stuffing, and many soups may last up to 4 days before bacteria levels reach critical points.

Using safe food-handling practices allows for healthy eating. The rest is a matter of taste.