

Hidden Dangers in Your Kitchen: What You Need to Know About Food Safety

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Every time you prepare a meal, you have the power to protect yourself and your loved ones from foodborne illness—yet millions of people worldwide become sick every year due to simple, preventable mistakes. Bacteria and harmful pathogens can lurk where you least expect them,

turning everyday foods into potential health risks. While anyone can be affected, children, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable. Understanding the basics of food safety—like proper handwashing, safe cooking temperatures, and smart food handling—can make all the difference in keeping your kitchen a safe and healthy space.

Recognizing Symptoms and High-Risk Foods

Foodborne illness can be tricky to identify because its symptoms—such as an upset stomach, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and dehydration—often mimic those of other common illnesses. However, if you experience these symptoms after eating certain high-risk foods, foodborne illness could be the culprit. If you suspect you have contracted a foodborne illness, seek medical treatment and report your case to your local health department to help identify potential outbreaks.

These foods are more likely to cause foodborne illnesses:

- Raw or undercooked poultry, meat, or fish (including sushi, sashimi, and ceviche)
- Raw and unwashed fruits and vegetables
- Unpasteurized juice, cider, or milk
- Soft cheeses like brie, camembert, and blue-veined cheese
- Raw or undercooked eggs or products containing raw eggs like cookie dough or Caesar salad dressing

Stay informed of current food recalls by visiting the [FDA's website](https://www.fda.gov/food/food-recalls) and discard any recalled food.

Four Essential Steps to Keep Your Food Safe

Proper food handling isn't just about cleanliness—it's about protecting yourself and your loved ones from harmful bacteria that can cause serious illness. By following these four essential steps—cleaning, separating, cooking, and chilling—you can significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illness and enjoy meals with confidence.



Clean

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash cutting boards, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each item.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with cool running water and pat dry with a paper towel. You do not need to use a specialized cleaning product for produce!
 - Use a scrub brush on firm fruits and vegetables like apples, melon, and potatoes.
 - Remove and discard outer leaves of cabbage and lettuce prior to consuming these.
 - Put fragile fruit like berries in a colander to rinse these.



Separate

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods in the grocery cart, bags, and fridge.
- Designate one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Never place cooked food onto a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood (unless this has been washed with hot soapy water).
- Do not reuse marinades from raw food unless these have been brought to a boil.



Cook

- A food thermometer is the only way to ensure the safety of meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs. You **cannot** rely on color and texture.
 - **Beef, Pork, Lamb, and Veal** (chop, roast, or steak): 145°F with 3-minute rest time.
 - **Ground meats:** 160°F
 - **Turkey, Chicken, Duck,:** 165°F
 - **Eggs and Egg Dishes:** 160°F
 - **Fish:** 145°F
 - **Leftovers and Casseroles:** 165°F
- Cook eggs until the yolk and whites are firm.
- Cover, rotate, and stir food heated in the microwave to ensure even cooking.
- Bring sauces, soups, and gravy to a boil when reheating.



Chill

- Keep your fridge at or below 40°F and your freezer at or below 0°F.
- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, and other perishable goods within two hours of purchasing or cooking these.
- Marinate all foods in the fridge.
- If you have leftovers, divide large quantities into shallow dishes for storage to allow for quicker cooling.
- Never thaw foods at room temperature – this can lead to bacterial growth. Instead use one of these safe methods:
 - **Fridge:** This is the safest but the slowest option. If you choose to thaw foods in the fridge, make sure to plan ahead! Once thawed, these foods are safe to use for 1-2 days before cooking.
 - **Cold Water:** This is a faster but more involved method. Fully submerge the food in cold (below 70°F), running tap water. Make sure to cook your food within four hours of thawing.
 - **Microwave:** This is the quickest method for thawing foods, but your food needs to be cooked immediately after thawing.



Choosing Safe, Fresh Foods from Store to Table

Your first line of defense for food safety is smart shopping, and that means a little extra vigilance at the grocery store. Always check labels for expiration and “use by” dates to ensure freshness. Inspect packaging for dents, tears, or leaks, as damaged containers can be a sign of contamination. Shop for perishable items like meat, dairy, and frozen foods last to limit their time outside of cold storage.

Small Steps, Big Difference

Food safety isn’t about complicated rules—it’s about simple, everyday precautions. By keeping your kitchen clean, handling food properly, cooking to safe temperatures, and storing items correctly, you can dramatically reduce the risk of foodborne illness. A little awareness goes a long way in ensuring that every meal is both delicious and safe. Stay informed, stay proactive, and most importantly, stay healthy!



Featured Recipe

Chickpea Summer Sandwich

For complete recipe and nutrition facts: [Love & Lemons](#)

Cook Time: **5 minutes**
Prep Time: **20 minutes**

Total Time: **25 minutes**
Servings: **3-4**



INGREDIENTS

Chickpea Salad

1½ cups cooked chickpeas, drained and rinsed

2 tablespoons tahini

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

½ garlic clove

1 teaspoon capers

1 green onion, chopped

2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the sandwiches

Handful of thin green beans, trimmed

1 soft baguette, sliced in half (or whole grain bread)

8 to 10 Kalamata olives, pitted and sliced in half

Thinly sliced red onion, rinsed and dried

Mayo, for spreading

¼ English cucumber, thinly sliced

1 radish, thinly sliced

6 to 8 fresh basil leaves

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make the chickpea salad: In a food processor, **combine** the chickpeas, tahini, Dijon mustard, garlic, capers, green onions, cilantro, lemon juice, and pinches of salt and pepper. **Pulse** until combined, but do not puree. **Season** to taste.
2. **Blanch** the green beans. Bring a small pot of salted water to a **boil** and place a bowl of ice water nearby. **Drop** the green beans into the boiling water for 1½ minutes, then **scoop** into the ice water to stop the cooking process. Once cool, **drain, pat dry**, and **chop** into 1-inch pieces.
3. Assemble the sandwiches: **Spread** the chickpea salad on one side of the baguette. **Press** the chopped green beans into the chickpea salad and **top** with the olives and red onion slices. **Spread** of layer of mayo on the other half of the baguette and top with the sliced cucumbers, radishes, and basil. **Season** with salt and pepper, to taste. **Press** together, slice, and enjoy!

Nutritional Information:

Serving Size: 1 sandwich

Calories: 388; Protein: 17g; Total Carbohydrates: 58g; Dietary Fiber: 13g; Fat: 11g; Saturated Fat: 2g.

