

Food safety basics

Easy · 15 min to read · Free (a food thermometer helps)

Wash hands for 20 seconds. Use one cutting board for raw meat and another for everything else. Check doneness with a thermometer: 165°F for chicken and leftovers, 160°F for ground meat, 145°F for steaks and fish. Refrigerate within 2 hours (1 hour above 90°F), keep the fridge at 40°F or below, and eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days. Never thaw meat on the counter.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Soap and hot water
- ☐ Two cutting boards, one just for raw meat
- ☐ A food thermometer
- ☐ An appliance thermometer for the fridge, if yours has no display
- ☐ Shallow containers for leftovers

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Wash your hands the right way.** Use plain soap and water, and scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails for at least 20 seconds.
- 2 **Keep raw meat away from everything else.** Use one cutting board for raw meat, poultry and seafood, and another for produce and anything that won't be cooked.
- 3 **Don't rinse raw meat, poultry or eggs.** Washing them spreads germs around your sink and counter.
- 4 **Cook to a safe temperature, and check it.** Put a thermometer in the thickest part of the food, not touching bone or fat.
- 5 **Keep hot food hot.** Food sitting out should stay at 140°F or above.
- 6 **Refrigerate within 2 hours.** Never leave perishable food out more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if it's above 90°F, like in a hot car or at a summer picnic.
- 7 **Set your fridge and freezer.** The fridge should be 40°F or below and the freezer 0°F or below.
- 8 **Thaw safely.** Thaw in the fridge, in cold water, or in the microwave.
- 9 **Eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days, or freeze them.** Frozen leftovers stay safe indefinitely but taste best within 3 to 4 months.

Watch out Don't wash raw chicken or other meat. It sprays germs around your sink and counter, and cooking to the right temperature is what makes it safe.

DAD NOTE Two cutting boards and a thermometer. That's the cheapest insurance in the kitchen.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/your-place/cooking-on-a-budget/food-safety-basics/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: FoodSafety.gov; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.