



Kitchen and food handling safety

Why is good kitchen hygiene important?

- The kitchen is a hotspot for bacteria and parasites. This is why good kitchen hygiene during both food preparation and cooking are extremely critical in terms of preventing food borne illnesses.
- Bacteria may sit on kitchen counters, stick to your raw meats, and end up contaminating all those delicious foods. These being germs, they are for the most part completely invisible.

Below are 10 must-follow kitchen hygiene rules:

1. Wash Your Hands!

Many people tend to assume that diarrhoea and other forms of sickness only come due to food poisoning from outside our homes. While you may never guarantee 100% protection against a diversity of food borne illnesses, there are several simple good kitchen hygiene precautions which you can implement towards reducing the risk.

Germs can very quickly and easily spread between our hands into the food, so keeping clean hands before initiating in any food handling process is essential. Washing hands properly when you are going to touch raw meat, especially after visiting the toilet or using the kitchen bin significantly helps in reducing the spread of several types of harmful bacteria like salmonella and E. coli.

Out there, you can pick up lots of bacteria, so it's vital to always thoroughly wash your hands prior to preparing or eating food. Using good anti-bacterial hand washes plus wipes can make all the difference in terms of kitchen hygiene. As part of your kitchen hygiene rules, use warm water and soap at all times, washing your hands thoroughly—at least for about 20 seconds.

If you only have to remember one critical thing about hygiene in the kitchen, remember this rule!

2. Proper Food Storage

Correct food storage is as critical as correct cooking. When storing cooked food in your fridge or cooler ensure it is at room temperature or even lower. Placing warm food inside a fridge implies it has not cooled evenly and could as such, cause food poisoning.

All food should always be covered, as left in the open it becomes vulnerable to bacteria. All raw animal foods should be stored in the fridge bottom. This is because raw fish, meat, and poultry can easily drip onto other ready-to-eat foods in the fridge causing potentially fatal illness.

Make it a habit to always check the instructions on food storage and the 'use by' date on all packaging. Any leftovers should be covered and stored in the fridge or freezer inside 2 hours of the cooking. First, ensure they have cooled completely before storing them.

3. Cook Food Thoroughly

You are perhaps thinking this is obvious stuff! But you will be surprised by the number of people who actually under cook their food. With undercooked food, there is a higher risk of harmful bacteria getting ingested which may trigger food poisoning. All animal foods ought to be cooked to a minimum of 170 ° F, if you want to get rid of viruses, bacteria, and parasites which bring food borne illnesses.

If unsure, cut into foods like meat, sausages, chicken, and burgers to check if they have been fully cooked all through. When you are reheating food, ensure it steams hot all through, and never have any food reheated more than once.

Hygiene in the kitchen includes washing vegetables and fruits to remove harmful bacteria and germs from the surface of the foods.

4. Never Defrost Food On The Counter

Defrost the food to be cooked in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave, never on the counter. All perishable foods must never be thawed on the counter for periods lasting more than 2 hours because while at the centre, the food may still be frozen but the outer food surface could enter into what is referred to as the Danger Zone.

This is a zone whose temperature range lies between 40° and 140°F, in which lethal bacteria tend to multiply rapidly. It is best to thaw all frozen foods by placing them in the fridge bottom shelf or under cold running water for less than an hour.

Poultry and meat can be thawed in airtight packaging placed in cold water, but ensure the water is changed every half hour and the thawed food must be used immediately. If time is a factor, you may use the microwave.

5. Clean Up and Down

After cooking, keeping a clean kitchen is very important. It is estimated that the average kitchen chopping board carries more faecal bacteria compared to the average toilet seat.

Damp kitchen sponges and washing brushes are known bacteria havens. Washing your kitchen and wiping down your equipment with the good hygiene products greatly reduces cross-contamination risk dramatically.

Also, bacterial growth is prevalent where water lingers for a while, so it's important to frequently wipe down the underside of your dish drainer. Better yet, get a dish drainer that has a spout that leads water into the sink.

Also, it's a good idea to invest in a steam mop as they're able to eliminate 99% of bacteria by using the extremely hot temperatures of steam. They're pretty versatile as they can clean different types of floors and surfaces too.

6. Either Keep It Hot Or Cold

If you cannot keep it hot or cold, then it's best not to keep it at all. There are some particular foods that are extremely vulnerable to rapid bacterial growth prior to cooking and after. This group of food includes poultry, eggs, fish, sliced melons, tofu, beans, rice, and sprouts. Such foods ought to always be kept above 140°F or below 40°F.

Never keep cooked food in your refrigerator for more than 7 days. If leftovers are to be safe, make sure you heat them to a minimum of 170° F! If you suspect that a food could be spoilt—uncharacteristic colour or odour or damaged packaging—it's best to throw it out.

7. Clean the Kitchen Sink and Oven

At least once each time you use the kitchen, wipe down the sink as part of your kitchen hygiene rules. Every week, disinfect it by filling it up with either hot or warm water plus a small quantity of bleach. Remember to scrub around the entire sink with a good scourer, not forgetting the inside of the plug and plug chain.

After every use, wipe out the oven using a cloth and warm water.

If the oven happens to be particularly dirty, perhaps after a heavy session of cooking and baking, prepare a thick bicarbonate of soda paste, smear this all over the oven, leaving it to do its part overnight. Come morning, grab a solid scourer, some warm water and then scrub away all the grime dirt using some elbow grease!

8. Avoid Cross Contamination

Always use individual or separate cutting boards for different food ingredients like fish/raw meat/poultry, farm produce, and cooked foods. Using a common chopping/cutting board poses a health risk, but these can be prevented easily through maintaining a clean kitchen at all times. You may, for example, opt to have a distinct red cutting board to be used specifically only for raw animal foods so as to avert any cross contamination.

The fact is that the majority of food poisoning cases actually happen within the home. It is usually a direct consequence of poor kitchen hygiene, where germs coming from raw foods get transferred to the kitchen surfaces and other foods as we prepare meals.

Poor personal cleansing can greatly reduce chances of cross contamination. Your personal health standards could have a significant effect on the spread of germs, bacteria, and illnesses through the way you come into contact with nutritional consumables.

9. Maintain the Kitchen Fridge And Freezer

At least once a month, take out the fridge shelves and compartments and have them washed with warm water and soap. As part of your hygiene rules, always rinse and dry the shelves before putting back. You can wipe the fridge inside with a mixture of water and bicarbonate of soda. Remember to wipe down the fridge outside too, particularly the handle!

For the freezer, when ice starts building up, it needs defrosting. After the ice has melted, take out all the compartments and shelves, washing them in soapy warm water, rinse them before placing them back. At least once a year, pull out the freezer and vacuum the unit's cooling elements to make it more efficient.

10. Use A Good Kitchen Bin

Without a mechanical garbage disposal unit in your kitchen, you will need to have a good kitchen bin or trash bag. What is most important is that you need to regularly empty your bin, preferably on a daily basis. If that does not happen, the food leftovers may start to decompose and bacteria will grow very fast in your kitchen.

Sooner or later, you may also begin to have unwanted “visitors” and a smelly odour. Besides regular trash removal and bin cleaning, your kitchen bin must have a tight lid and a bonus if it’s touchless sensed or pedal opened.

Final Word on Good Kitchen Hygiene Rules

Personal hygiene is in general extremely important in terms of preventing food poisoning and sickness coming from the kitchen. Proper hand washing, upholding general cleanliness and being alert to the dangers associated with cross contamination are some of the most important factors to keep in mind as you prepare food.

Keeping good kitchen hygiene standards helps in preventing the growth and spread of bacteria, infections, bad odours, and illnesses. Maintaining hygiene in the kitchen and a clean kitchen becomes necessary for a variety of reasons – personal, psychological, health, social, or simply as a normal way of life.

Remember

Wash Your Hands. ...

Sanitize Sponges And Dishcloths Periodically. ...

Clean Counters. ...

Sanitize Cutting Board. ...

Clean the Refrigerator. ...

Handle Raw Meat With Caution. ...

Clean Fresh Produce.

Wear a clean apron.

Wear closed-in shoes to protect your feet, in case of hot spills or breakages.

Wash your hands before and after handling food.

Keep food preparation surfaces clean.

Tie back long hair.

Store food appropriately.