

Dietitian experts offer holiday food safety tips

December 24 2015



For starters, check temperatures with a food thermometer.

(HealthDay)—As families gather around the table to share holiday meals and treats, food poisoning is usually the last thing on anyone's mind.

But [food](#) safety should always be considered, and the holidays aren't an exception, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

There are many common mistakes people can make while preparing meals, buffets or homemade holiday gifts, the academy cautioned. Nutritional experts from the academy provided 10 tips to help home cooks keep their families, loved ones and co-workers safe this [holiday season](#):

- **Keep hands clean.** Cooks and bakers should wash their hands before, during and after preparing food. Proper hand hygiene can

get rid of most germs that cause food poisoning. It's important for people working in a kitchen to wash their hands between tasks, particularly if they've been handling raw meat.

- **Clean all tools and surfaces.** Kitchen appliances, counters, cutting boards, utensils and other cooking tools and surfaces should be washed with hot, soapy water throughout the cooking process.
- **Use more than one cutting board.** Raw meat, poultry and fish should always be separated from other foods, including fruits and vegetables. Be sure to prepare these foods on separate surfaces or cutting boards. It's a good idea to use colored cutting boards so the ones used for raw meats, poultry and fish are easily identifiable.
- **Don't mix utensils.** Different forks, spoons or other cooking tools should be used to taste, stir and serve food.
- **Use a food thermometer.** This is the only reliable way to know if your food is cooked thoroughly to the proper temperature. Never rely on "clear juices" to determine if a turkey is fully cooked.
- **Don't let food sit out.** Food should be refrigerated within two hours of being served. This prevents harmful bacteria that can cause food poisoning from growing.
- **Check the fridge temperature.** It's a good idea to use a refrigerator thermometer to ensure it's set to a temperature below 40F.
- **Defrost safely.** Foods should not defrost at room temperature or in a bath of warm water. Instead, defrost food in the microwave or in the refrigerator. While food like [raw meat](#) is thawing in the fridge, be sure to cover it and place it on a low shelf so juices won't drip onto other foods. Foods defrosted in the microwave should be cooked immediately.
- **Plan ahead.** If food needs to be transported to a party, be sure to cook it thoroughly at home first and make sure it remains

refrigerated as long as possible.

- **Don't sample batter.** If you're baking holiday treats, don't eat cookie and cake batters that contain raw eggs. These can cause [food poisoning](#).

It's also important to be mindful about leftovers. Uneaten foods should be properly stored in shallow containers no more than 2 inches deep. Leftovers should be refrigerated or frozen after two hours.

Poultry should be removed from the bone and separated from stuffing and gravy. Breast meat and legs should also be sliced. Turkey meat should be eaten within four days, but gravy is only good for two days after cooking. Leftovers should be reheated to 165 degrees Fahrenheit. Any foods that may no longer be fresh should be discarded.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [food safety](#).

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Citation: Dietitian experts offer holiday food safety tips (2015, December 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-dietitian-experts-holiday-food-safety.html>

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