FN701 (Reviewed Nov. 2026)

Older Adults and Food Safety: What's Cooking?

Prevent foodborne illness with these four simple steps to preparing food safely at home:

1 Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often.

Bacteria can be present throughout the kitchen, including on cutting boards, utensils, sponges and countertops. Here's how to Fight BAC:

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with warm, soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food. Periodically use kitchen sanitizers (a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach to 1 quart water) for added protection.
- Use plastic or other nonporous cutting boards. Run these boards through the dishwasher or wash in warm, soapy water after use. Replace worn cutting boards or those that have developed hard-to-clean grooves.
- Consider using paper towels to clean kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Rinse raw produce in water. Don't use soap or other detergents. If necessary, use a small vegetable brush on firm produce to remove surface dirt.



2 Separate: Don't cross-contaminate.

Cross-contamination is the scientific term for how bacteria can be spread from one food product to another. This is especially true when handling raw meat, poultry and seafood, so keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods. Here's how to Fight BAC:

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and your refrigerator.
- Place raw meat, poultry and seafood on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator.
- If possible, put raw meat in a plastic sack before placing it in your shopping cart.
- Use a different cutting board for raw meat products if possible.
- Always wash hands, cutting boards, dishes and utensils with warm, soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and unwashed fresh produce.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

NDSU EXTENSION

North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota

Cook: Cook food to proper temperatures. 3

Food safety experts agree foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Here's the best way to Fight BAC:

- Use a clean thermometer, which measures the internal temperature of cooked foods, to make sure meat, poultry, casseroles and other foods are cooked all the way through.
- Cook roasts and steaks to at least 145 degrees Fahrenheit.* Cook poultry to 165 degrees.
- Cook ground beef, where bacteria can spread during processing, to at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit. Check the temperature with a thermometer. If one is not available, do not eat ground beef that still is pink inside.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or partially cooked.
- Fish should be opaque and flake easily with a fork.
- When cooking in a microwave oven, make sure the food has no cold spots where bacteria can survive. For best results, cover food, stir and rotate for even cooking. If the microwave does not have a turntable, rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.
- Bring sauces, soups and gravies to a boil when reheating. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

* Allow a three-minute rest time.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. 4

Refrigerate foods quickly. Cold temperatures keep harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Set your refrigerator no higher than 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the freezer unit at 0 degrees. Check these temperatures occasionally with an appliance thermometer. Then Fight BAC by following these steps:

- Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers within two hours.
- Never defrost food at room temperature. Thaw food in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave. Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.
- Don't pack the refrigerator. Cool air must circulate to keep food safe.



Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., R.D., L.R.D.
Food and Nutrition Specialist

Source: Adapted with permission from FDA/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, May 1999; www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/seniorsd.html
Developed in cooperation with AARP

For more information about food safety, visit the NDSU Extension website: **www.ag.ndsu.edu/food**

North Dakota State University is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Requests for accommodations related to disability may be made at 701-231-1865.

web-3-24, web-11-26