The Recovery Kitchen: A Quick Guide to Food Safety

Now that you're cooking for yourself (congrats on taking that healthy step!), it's essential to add food safety to your list of kitchen to-dos. One in six Americans gets sick every year from food poisoning, according to Foodsafety.gov. If you're in early recovery and/or your immune system is still compromised from substance abuse, you may be even more vulnerable. The good news: Taking a few precautions when prepping, cooking and storing food can help keep you safe and free from foodborne illnesses like salmonella, e. coli and listeria.

Cleanliness – meaning the area where you cook, the foods you use and your own hands – is the cornerstone of avoiding food poisoning. That's because bacteria can spread easily around the kitchen and to your food.

Follow these guidelines:

Wash

- Always keep hands, counters and cooking tools clean.
- Wash hands in warm water with soap for 20 to 30 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash cutting boards, knives, cooking utensils and countertops with hot, soapy water after each use.
- Sanitize sponges and replace frequently. You can sanitize sponges by placing them in the microwave for one minute or by running them through the hot cycle in the dishwasher.

Keeping different kinds of foods separate from one another is key to preventing cross-contamination. This can happen when raw meat, poultry, eggs or seafood come in contact with uncooked foods, such as vegetables, fruit or bread.

Separate

- When grocery shopping, keep raw meat, poultry and seafood separate from other foods in the shopping cart and when bagging.
- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood in the refrigerator. These items should be placed on the bottom shelf so that juices don't drip onto other foods.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, eggs and seafood to themselves. If possible, use separate cutting boards for each and clean the boards and any knives you use in between using hot, soapy water.
- Don't put cooked or ready-to-eat food on a board or plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, eggs or seafood.

Harmful bacteria is killed when food is safely cooked to a high enough internal temperature. Heat kills germs!

Cook

○ To be sure food is cooked to a safe internal temperature use a food thermometer.

○ Follow these safe internal temperatures guidelines for each type of meat/fish:
  - Beef, pork, or lamb on the bone: 145°F
  - Fish: 145°F
  - Ground beef, pork, lamb: 160°F
  - Turkey, chicken, duck: 165°F

○ Stay out of the "danger zone," which is between 40°F and 140°F. This is the ideal temperature for bacteria to multiply.

○ Once a food is hot and has reached the safe internal temperature, keep it hot by using the oven (set to a low temperature), slow cooker, warming tray or chafing dish.

Cooling foods down properly is essential, especially when working with leftovers or dishes you're making to eat later.

Chill

○ Perishable foods must be refrigerated at or below 40°F within two hours. In summer, it's best to do this within one hour if the temperature is over 90°F.

○ Marinate foods in the refrigerator, not on the counter.

○ Thaw foods in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave.

Know when to throw out expired or spoiled foods.

Toss

○ Be sure to reheat leftovers thoroughly, to at least 165°F.

○ Leftovers can typically stay safely in the refrigerator for four or five days, or in the freezer for up to three months.

○ Know the difference between the "sell by," "best if used by" and "use by" date:
  - The "sell by" date is the last day a store should sell that package.
  - The "best if used by" date is a suggestion to achieve the best flavor or quality for a product. Even if this date has passed, it should be safe if stored and handled properly.
  - The "use by" date is the manufacturer's last date recommended for use of the product at peak quality.

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