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A Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling

Refrigerate food to keep it safe.

Check the temperature of your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer you can buy at a variety or hardware store. To keep bacteria in check, the refrigerator should run at 40° F; the freezer unit at 0° F. Generally, keep your refrigerator as cold as possible without freezing your milk or lettuce.

- ✓ Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish immediately if you can't use it within a few days.
- ✓ Put packages of raw meat, poultry or fish on a plate before refrigerating so their juices won't drip on other food. Raw juices often contain bacteria.

Keep food preparation areas and tools clean.

Thaw food in the refrigerator.

- ✓ Wash hands in hot soapy water *before* preparing food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- ✓ Bacteria can live in kitchen towels, sponges and cloths. Wash and replace them often.
- ✓ Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food. For instance, wash your hands, cutting board and knife in hot soapy water after cutting up the chicken and before dicing salad ingredients.
- ✓ Use plastic cutting boards rather than wooden ones where bacteria can hide in grooves. Replace plastic cutting boards when they become badly grooved.
- ✓ Thaw food in the microwave or refrigerator, *NOT* on the kitchen counter. The danger? Bacteria can grow in the outer layers of the food before the inside thaws. Marinate in the refrigerator too.