



Remember Food Safety for Summer Grilling

If this summer's plans include a barbecue, be prepared so food remains safe while cooking on the grill.

Always wash hands before and after handling food. Wash hands for 15 to 20 seconds using warm, soapy water. No need to watch the clock or wonder how long 15 seconds is, just sing "Happy Birthday" twice through. Also, use clean utensils, containers and surfaces because if they aren't clean, they can contaminate food with bacteria and viruses that could cause foodborne illnesses. Don't use utensils that have touched raw meats on other food items.

Grilling is a healthy way to prepare food because foods are cooked without adding extra fat. Marinades tenderize meat surfaces, but cutting a quarter inch deep cut with a knife in several places of the meat before coating it with the marinade will help the marinade soak into the meat. Marinating meat or vegetables requires three things:

- an acid ingredient to tenderize the meat, such as lemon juice, wine, vinegar, yogurt, balsamic vinegar or soy sauce
- herbs and spices for flavor and zest, such as garlic, red pepper flakes, green onions, rosemary, thyme, onion or ginger
- time: 30 minutes for flavor and up to four hours for marinating

Once the marinade is added, place items in the refrigerator. Don't thaw or marinate foods at room temperature. Use a non-reactive, sealed container or a sealable plastic bag. Also, try to avoid using metal containers, especially aluminum or cast iron. Make sure any marinade used on raw meat or poultry is not used on cooked food unless it is boiled. Discard leftover marinade that is contaminated with raw meat or poultry juices.

If cooking vegetables on the grill, large vegetables – like corn on the cob, eggplant or asparagus – can be placed directly on the grill. Chopped vegetables should be wrapped in aluminum foil. Add flavor by adding herbs and spices to the vegetables before wrapping them in the foil and placing them on the grill.

Make sure the grill is hot before placing food on it. Preheat coals on a charcoal grill at least 20 to 30 minutes before adding food. For other grills, allow 15 to 30 minutes for it to preheat before cooking foods.

Thoroughly cook food at one time because if food is partially cooked, bacteria can grow without being killed by enough heat. Use a food thermometer because the meat's color or juice is not a reliable indicator on how well it's cooked. Make sure to use a clean food thermometer to check for correct internal temperatures:

- Hamburgers should be 160 degrees Fahrenheit
- Beef, veal, lamb steaks and roasts should be 145 degrees Fahrenheit for medium rare; 160 degrees Fahrenheit for medium
- Poultry should be 165 degrees Fahrenheit
- Fish should be opaque and flake easily, 145 degrees Fahrenheit

Always remember to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Foods shouldn't sit out for more than one hour, especially when it is hot outside. Make plans so that food is eaten almost immediately after it is cooked. If there are leftovers, refrigerate them right away or put into coolers with a lot of ice. If leftovers have been sitting out in hot weather for more than one hour, throw them away. The longer food is at unsafe temperatures, the more likely harmful bacteria can grow and cause foodborne illness. Cold foods kept in coolers with ice are safe, but if ice has melted, that food should be thrown out.