

Food Safety Research: Don't Cook on "Autopilot"

Research Background

America's food supply is safer than ever due to hard work taking place on farms, ranches and in processing plants across the country. Each segment of the production chain has taken steps to keep food safe and is committed to the fight against foodborne pathogens. However, there are still many opportunities for consumers to improve food safety in their own kitchens.

Janet Anderson, M.S., R.D., of Utah State University and her colleagues at The Safe Food Institute set out to look at what people really do when preparing food in the home through their research study, "A Camera's View of Consumer Food-Handling Behaviors." They found that many people were just flying on "autopilot" and weren't paying enough attention to their food preparation habits.

Hand Washing	<p>The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends consumers use warm water to moisten their hands and then apply soap and rub their hands together for 20 seconds before rinsing thoroughly.</p> <p>While 97 people during the study attempted to wash their hands at least one time, the average hand wash length was significantly lower than the 20-second recommendation, and only one-third of study participants' hand wash attempts were with soap.</p> <p>In order to make proper hand washing a part of the kitchen routine, keep a roll of paper towels nearby to use after each time you wash your hands when handling food. Hand towels are a breeding ground for bacteria which can then spread to clean surfaces. Another helpful tool is incorporating hand washing reminders right into your recipe instructions.</p>													
Cross-Contamination	<p>Research showed that unwashed hands were the most common cross-contamination agents.</p> <p>Eighty-four percent of participants cross-contaminated raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and/or unwashed vegetables with ready-to-eat foods multiple times while preparing food.</p> <p>To avoid the danger of cross-contamination store raw meat, poultry and seafood on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator, so juices do not drip onto other foods. Also, be sure to thoroughly wash plate, cutting boards and other utensils after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood. You should use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods. Think ahead when at the grill and have a clean plate ready for cooked meat.</p>													
Cook Temperatures	<p>Using a meat thermometer is the only reliable way to ensure safety and to determine the "doneness" of meat, poultry, and egg products no matter how they are prepared.</p> <p>However, an overwhelming 76 percent of research participants attempted to check doneness of the meat, poultry or seafood entrée by using a knife or another utensil to cut or poke the entrée to evaluate changes in color and texture. In addition, nearly half of the participants were unaware of the proper internal temperatures for meat products.</p> <p>Tips on selecting and using a meat thermometer can be found online at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Thermy/index.asp.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="329 1318 1515 1457"> <tr> <td data-bbox="329 1318 922 1402">To be safe, foods must be cooked to an internal temperature high enough to destroy harmful bacteria such as <i>Salmonella</i> and <i>E. coli O157:H7</i>.</td> <th colspan="2" data-bbox="930 1318 1515 1346">Recommended Internal Temperatures</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="329 1346 922 1373"></td> <td data-bbox="930 1346 1235 1373">Poultry</td> <td data-bbox="1243 1346 1515 1373">165 °F</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="329 1373 922 1402"></td> <td data-bbox="930 1373 1235 1402">Ground Beef</td> <td data-bbox="1243 1373 1515 1402">160 °F</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="329 1402 922 1457"></td> <td data-bbox="930 1402 1235 1457">Beef Roasts, Steaks and Seafood</td> <td data-bbox="1243 1402 1515 1457">145 °F</td> </tr> </table>		To be safe, foods must be cooked to an internal temperature high enough to destroy harmful bacteria such as <i>Salmonella</i> and <i>E. coli O157:H7</i> .	Recommended Internal Temperatures			Poultry	165 °F		Ground Beef	160 °F		Beef Roasts, Steaks and Seafood	145 °F
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Food Safety Questions	<p>USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: For food safety questions on topics including safe storage and handling of food, safe preparation, product dating, product content and more. The hotline is open from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. EST on weekdays year round. Call toll-free: 888-MPHotline (888-674-6854) Email: mph hotline.fsis@usda.gov Online: www.fsis.usda.gov</p> <p>Beef Industry Food Safety Council: http://www.bifsc.org/AboutBIFSCo.aspx</p> <p>Beef It's What's For Dinner: http://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/</p>													

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture, Journal of THE AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION.