



## HOW TO KEEP YOUR FOOD SAFE FROM FOODBORNE DISEASES

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### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are around 600 million cases of foodborne illness and 420,000 deaths each year, worldwide. According to the same organization, the African and South-East Asia Regions have the highest incidence and death rates due to foodborne illness.

There are no consistent data comparing the rate of foodborne illness that is annually originating at home versus the percentage of cases that occur in the commercial and catering sector. Nevertheless, domestic preparation of food is recognised as a key stage where foodborne disease can be acquired if good food safety and hygiene practices are not applied.

Awareness and good handling practices during food storage, preparation and cooking are key to ensure that food prepared at home is safe and won't make us, and our families, sick.

### The Causes of Foodborne Diseases

Foodborne diseases may be caused by a variety of contaminants such as bacteria, toxins, viruses, parasites, and chemicals (such as heavy metal, natural occurring toxins, pesticides and antibiotics). The contamination of food may happen at any point of the food chain, from farm to table.

Inadequate temperature control in both storage and cooking/reheating, cross-contamination between raw/cooked products, consumption of under cooked meat/fish/eggs, inadequate hygiene

practices, and inadequate sanitation of cooking utensils, are among the many factors that may be in the origin of foodborne diseases.

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### **How to Prevent Foodborne Diseases at Home**

It all starts at the supermarket. Always verify and exclude products that are past their expiry date or packages which are visibly soiled, dented, rusted or otherwise damaged. For frozen products, avoid packages containing ice crystals which indicate that the product may have been defrosted during storage due to wrong temperature control.

At home, whenever possible exclude the outside package of products that are going to be stored. For example, the plastic or card boxes containing several packages, which may be contaminated by, for instance, rat urine, or could house cockroaches / cockroach eggs.

### **Kitchen Golden Rules**

Hands are the most frequent and easiest way of transport for different kinds of contamination. Always wash hands properly before cooking or handling food, and after handling waste or using the toilet.

Don't leave products at room temperature waiting to defrost or to be prepared, and don't refreeze. Food should be left to defrost in the fridge as also any other refrigerated food items should only be removed at preparation time.

Fruit and vegetables may be subject to various contaminations, for example, among others, by animal faeces or by the water that was used to grow them. Always disinfect fruit and vegetables that are not going to be cooked (for example, salad, tomato, carrots, strawberries, among others). Remove damaged parts and wash in running water, separating the leaves from the vegetables; soak in chlorine solution (1 tablespoon of bleach per litre of water) for about fifteen minutes; rinse with potable water; dry with a paper towel or food centrifuge and store it immediately in the fridge.

Different foods are subject to different types and levels of contamination, so use different utensils or wash them properly when moving from raw to cooked food or between different food types (for

example, vegetables/meat/fish). For instance, don't use the same knife to cut raw and cooked meat/fish or to prepare vegetables/bread.

Keep working areas clean during preparation and ensure proper waste management. Empty the waste bin when it is two thirds full and always clean it before putting in a new bag.

Cook the right quantity of food to avoid leftovers. If there are still leftovers, store them in the fridge as soon as possible, label them with cooking date and always keep in mind that different food can be stored for different periods (for example, while soup can be kept in the fridge for 4 – 5 days, seafood can only be stored for 1 – 2 days, maximum). So, always check and respect the storage period recommended for each food or leftover.

## **Conclusion**

Awareness and good practices are not only for people working in the catering industry or food business chain. Foodborne diseases may occur at home when good hygiene and other preventive measures are not considered. To avoid the worst, each of us must stay informed. Maintain cleanliness and implement good practices when preparing meals at home.

**Social Media:** <http://www.linkedin.com/in/leonor-assunção-6252947>