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LET'S TALK ABOUT FOOD SAFETY

With summer, barbecues and outdoor eating, it is all too easy to forget about food hygiene. Don't spoil your day - take a look at quick and easy ways to stay safe.

A little about food hygiene...

Food can be contaminated **at any point** during slaughtering, harvesting, processing, storage, distribution, transportation, or preparation.

Lack of adequate food hygiene can lead to foodborne illness **(food poisoning)** and even death.

Food poisoning is caused by **eating contaminated food.** It is not usually serious, and most people get better within a few days without treatment. In most cases of food poisoning, the food is contaminated by bacteria, such as salmonella or E. coli, or a virus, such as norovirus.

Symptoms of food poisoning usually begin within one to two days of eating contaminated food, although they may start at any point between a few hours and several weeks later.

Remember the "Four Cs:"

Cleaning:

- **Effective cleaning** removes bacteria on hands, equipment, and surfaces. This helps to stop harmful bacteria and viruses from spreading onto food.

- **Wash or change dishcloths, tea towels, sponges and oven gloves** regularly. It's important to let them dry before you use them again. This is because dirty, damp cloths allow bacteria to breed.

- Take care to **keep all utensils and dishes clean** before preparing food. This is to avoid cross-contamination. You should use different utensils, plates and chopping boards when preparing ready-to-eat foods and raw foods that require cooking.

- You should **not wash raw meat** as it can spread harmful bacteria. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present. You should **wash fruit and vegetables** with water before you eat them, making sure to rub their skins under the water. **Peeling vegetables** can also remove more bacteria. Peeling is an additional precaution you can take when eating root vegetables raw.

- A wide range of cleaning products are available. Remember **detergents** clean the surface and remove grease, but they do not kill bacteria. **Disinfectants** kill bacteria. Disinfectants should be used on a visibly clean surface as they do not work effectively if the surface is covered in grease or visible dirt.

Chilling, freezing and storing food:

- **Chilling food** properly helps to stop harmful bacteria from growing.

- To keep food safe, **store in your fridge,** keep food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation, cool cooked food quickly at room temperature and then place in the fridge within one to two hours, and follow the storage instructions and packaging, including the best before and use by dates.

- You need to **check that your fridge is cold enough** using a fridge thermometer. The coldest part of your fridge should be below 5° C.

For further information, contact your Duradiamond Healthcare Account Manager or Chief Medical Officer on 01273 023131

- **Don't overfill your fridge.** Leaving space allows air to circulate and maintains the set temperature.

- Freezers act as a pause button: food in the freezer won't deteriorate and **most bacteria cannot grow in it.** The bacteria are still alive, but they stop growing or producing toxins.

- Because the bacteria haven't been killed, they may be revived as the food defrosts. Make sure the food never enters the danger zone because the bacteria may grow and make you ill. This is why you should **defrost food within a fridge.**

- You can freeze pre-packaged food right up to the **use-by date.** Leftovers and home-made goods should be frozen as soon as possible. Make sure any warm dishes are cool before putting them in your freezer.

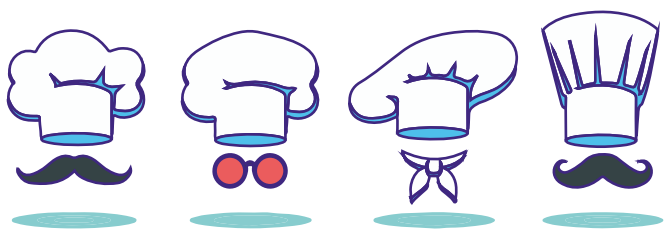
- It doesn't matter if you cook your meat from frozen or fresh. This meal can then be frozen, but **make sure you only reheat it once.**

- **Cover raw food,** including meat, and keep it separate from ready-to-eat food. Store raw meat, poultry, fish, and shellfish on the bottom shelf of your fridge as this is the coolest area.

- When shopping make sure to **pack raw and ready-to-eat food separately.** Keep cleaning products and other household items separate from food.

Cooking:

- Cooking food at the **right temperature and for the correct length of time** will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed. Always check the advice on the food packaging and follow the cooking instructions provided.



- **Meat:** before you serve pork, poultry and minced meat, make sure that it is steaming hot and cooked all the way through. When you cut into the thickest part of the meat check that none of the meat is pink and that any juices run clear. In a whole bird this is the area between the leg and the breast.

- **Follow this advice when cooking:** turkey, chicken, duck, goose, pork, and minced meat products such as kebabs, sausages and burgers.

- **Why you should not serve burgers rare or pink?** Whole cuts of meat, such as steaks and joints, only ever have bacteria on the outside surface of the meat. When meat is minced to make a burger, any harmful bacteria from the surface of the meat can spread throughout the burger. As a result, rare and undercooked burgers can have harmful bacteria inside may cause food poisoning if not fully cooked.

- **How time and temperature kill bacteria:** during cooking, heat energy transfers into and breaks down proteins in the food. The meat changes colour from pink to brown or to white. Its texture changes too.

- Cooking also causes the proteins and bacteria to break up until they no longer function and the bacteria die. This is why cooking removes the risk from harmful bacteria that are in some food.

- Bacteria usually grow in the **"danger zone" between 8° C and 60° C.** Below 8°C, growth is stopped or significantly slowed down. Above 60° C the bacteria start to die.

- **Time and temperature** are both important, because proteins need to be heated up for a long enough time for them all to be broken down.

- Standard advice is to **cook food until it has reached 70°C and stayed at that temperature for two minutes.**

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(Avoid) cross-contamination:

- Cross-contamination is when bacteria spreads between foods/services/ equipment. To avoid it, clean and disinfect work surfaces and equipment before and after use

- Use different equipment and machinery, even different cleaning equipment for raw versus ready-to-eat food

- Wash hands before food preparation and wash hands after touching raw food.

- Store ready-to-eat and raw food separately and provide separate work areas for preparation of these foods.

Buying and eating food

Allergy and intolerance:

- In the UK, food businesses must tell you if they use any of the **14 key allergens** as ingredients in the food and drink they may provide. Food businesses include restaurants, café's and take ways, and businesses that produce, manufacture or prepack food.

- The information may be provided on the packaging, or if you are eating out on a menu or a written signpost.

- When you buy **vegan food,** you may not expect it to contain any trace amounts of milk, egg, fish, crustaceans, molluscs; however trace amounts of cross-contamination can occur when vegan food is produced in a factory or kitchen that also handles non-vegan food. Therefore packaging for some vegan products sometimes includes the precautionary allergen labelling such as "may contain".

Best before and use-by dates:

- Food may contain bacteria and, if stored for too long or at the wrong temperature, can cause food poisoning. It's therefore important to understand the different types of dates and advice on food packaging.

- **A use-by date** on food is about safety. This is the most important date to remember. Foods can be eaten until the use-by date but not after. For the use-by date to be a valid guide, you must carefully follow storage instructions. After the use-by date, don't eat it, cook it or freeze it. The food could be unsafe to eat or drink, even if it has been stored correctly and looks and smells fine.

- The **best-before date** is about quality and not safety. The food will be safe to eat after this date but may not be at its best. It's flavour and texture might not be as good. The best-before date will only be accurate if the food is stored according to the instructions on the packaging.

Food hygiene rating scheme:

- The scheme helps you choose where to eat out or shop for food, by giving you clear information about businesses' hygiene standards. The businesses are given a rating from five to zero, which is displayed at their premises and online, so you can make more informed choices about where to buy and eat food:

5 - hygiene standards are very good
4 - hygiene standards are good
3 - hygiene standards are generally satisfactory
2 - some improvement is necessary
1 - major improvement is necessary
0 - urgent improvement is required.

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What should I do if I get food poisoning?

Most people with food poisoning **recover at home** and don't need any specific treatment, although there are some situations where you should see your GP for advice (see below).

Until you feel better, you should **rest and drink fluids** to prevent dehydration. Eat when you feel up to it, but try small, light meals at first and stick to bland foods such as toast, crackers, bananas and rice, until you begin to feel better.

Oral rehydration solutions, available from pharmacies, are recommended for more vulnerable people such as the elderly and those of another health condition.

You should contact your GP if:

- Your symptoms are severe
- Your symptoms don't start to improve after a few days
- You have symptoms of severe dehydration, such as confusion, rapid heartbeat, sunken eyes and passing little or no urine
- You are pregnant
- You are over 60
- Your baby or young child has suspected food poisoning
- You have a long-term underlying condition, such as inflammatory bowel disease, heart valve disease, diabetes or kidney disease
- You have a weak immune system for example because of medication, cancer treatment or HIV.

Common food safety questions

There are a number of myths and misconceptions about food safety.

How long can you safely eat rice for after cooking?

Rice may be eaten cold if it is cooled down quickly. Put the **rest in the fridge** and consume within **24 hours.**

You can get food poisoning from eating reheated rice. It is not the reheating that causes the problem, but the way the rice has been stored before it is reheated.

Keep the rice in the fridge no more than one day until reheating. When you reheat any rice always check the dish is steaming hot, heated all the way through and served immediately.

Uncooked rice can contain spores of bacteria. This bacteria can cause food poisoning. The spores can survive being coach.

The longer cooked rice is left at room temperature, the more likely it is that the bacteria or toxins will make the rights unsafe to eat.

You should never reheat rice more than once. Extra care should be taken with takeaway rice.

Ideally takeaway rice should be eaten shortly after purchase or shortly after it has been delivered. This is because some food businesses may precook their rice and then reheat it before it is given to customers.

When eggs float, are they bad?

It is not recommended to use the egg float test to tell if eggs are safe or not. Eggs are safe to eat for a couple of days after the best-before date.

The best-before date should be stamped on the egg. You should make sure both white and yolk of the egg cooked thoroughly.

Sources: www.who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/food-hygiene/en/ , www.food.gov.uk/ , www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/food-poisoning