

# Food Safety Myths

**Myth:** Food poisoning isn't that big of a deal. I just have to tough it out for a day or two and then it's over.

**Fact:** Many people don't know it, but some foodborne illnesses can actually lead to long-term health conditions such as pain in your joints, irritation of the eyes and painful urination lasting for months or years or paralysis that lasts several weeks. Approximately, 3,000 Americans a year die from foodborne illness.

**Myth:** It's OK to thaw meat on the counter. Since it starts out frozen, bacteria isn't really a problem.

**Fact:** Actually, illness-causing bacteria grow surprisingly rapidly at room temperatures, so the counter is never a place you should thaw foods. There are several ways to thaw meat safely such as, thawing in the refrigerator, place meat in the sink under running water, or allow the meat to thaw as you cook the meat.

**Myth:** When cleaning my kitchen, more bleach I use the better job I do of killing more bacteria, so it's safer for my family.

**Fact:** There is actually no advantage to using more bleach than needed. To use just one teaspoon of liquid, unscented bleach to one quart of water.

**Myth:** I don't need to wash fruits or vegetables if I'm going to peel them.

**Fact:** Because it's easy to transfer bacteria from the peel or rind you're cutting to the inside of your fruits and veggies, it's important to wash all produce, even if you plan to peel it.

**Myth:** To get rid of any bacteria on my meat, poultry, or seafood, I should rinse off the juices with water first.

**Fact:** Actually, rinsing meat, poultry, or seafood with water can increase your chance of food poisoning by splashing juices (and any bacteria they might contain) onto your sink and counters. The best way to cook meat, poultry, or seafood safely is to make sure you cook it to the right temperature or until the meat is cooked thoroughly.

**Myth:** The only reason to let food sit after it's been microwaved is to make sure you don't burn yourself on food that's too hot.

**Fact:** In fact, letting microwaved food sit for a few minutes helps your food cook more completely by allowing colder areas of food time to absorb heat from hotter areas of food.

**Myth:** Leftovers are safe to eat until they smell bad.

**Fact:** The kinds of bacteria that cause food poisoning do not affect the look, smell, or taste of food. To be safe, to make sure you know the right time to throw food out.

**Myth:** Once food has been cooked, all the bacteria have been killed, so I don't need to worry once it's —done.

**Fact:** Actually, the possibility of bacterial growth actually increases after cooking, because the drop in temperature allows bacteria to thrive. This is why keeping cooked food warmed to the right temperature is critical for food safety.

**Myth:** Marinades are acidic, which kills bacteria—so it's OK to marinate foods on the counter.

**Fact:** Even in the presence of acidic marinade, bacteria can grow very rapidly at room temperatures. To marinate foods safely, it's important to marinate them in the refrigerator.

**Myth:** If I really want my produce to be safe, I should wash fruits and veggies with soap or detergent before I use them.

**Fact:** In fact, it's best not to use soaps or detergents on produce, since these products can linger on foods and are not safe for consumption. The best way to remove bacteria is to use clean running water to wash produce.