Cooking your food

How to cook your food to prevent food poisoning.

Cooking food at the right temperature and for the correct length of time will kill any harmful bacteria that may be present.

Cooking top tips

Make sure your food is safe with our top tips:

- always follow cooking temperature guidelines according to the recipe or packet instructions carefully
- check that food is cooked completely before serving - use visual cues, such as making sure the food is steaming hot
- consider using a food thermometer to verify the correct temperature
- practice good hygiene when preparing and cooking your food - have a read of our cleaning and cross-contamination pages for more info
- look to store leftovers correctly to keep food safe and avoid food waste - our chilling page has tips and advice that can help.
- remember to take extra care when reheating leftovers - you can find our guidance in the 'using your leftovers' section on this page

How to check food is cooked properly

Checking your food is cooked properly will help you to avoid food poisoning.

Foods can vary in the ways and times you need to cook them before they are ready to eat. We have specific information for different foods, such as meat, fish, and frozen vegetables on this page.

But here are some general ways to check food is cooked properly.

Using visual cues to check food is cooked properly

If you don't have a food thermometer, then you can use visual cues. These can vary according to the food you are cooking.

You should use a combination of these methods to ensure food is cooked properly:

- check if the food is steaming - you should see steam rising from the surface of the food, as well as in the middle of the food when it is cut into
- with certain meats like chicken - cut into the thickest part and check there is no pink meat left and that juices run clear
- when cooking a larger dish like lasagne - you should see steam rising from the surface, cut into the dish and look for steam escaping from the inside and middle (the surface of the

food may also bubble)

Using a food thermometer

You can also use a clean food thermometer to check if food is cooked thoroughly.

Remember to fully clean the temperature probe or cooking thermometer after each use to [avoid cross-contamination](#) and to get an accurate reading. Please see our ideal cooking temperatures and times section on this page to ensure your food is fully cooked and safe to eat.

Be careful when checking the temperature of food by touch, as this can cause cross-contamination if your hands aren't clean, and you could burn yourself on very hot food.

Cooking temperatures and times

To ensure that food is fully cooked, the middle of the food should reach a temperature of 70°C for 2 minutes or the following temperature-time combinations:

- 60°C for 45 minutes
- 65°C for 10 minutes
- 70°C for 2 minutes
- 75°C for 30 seconds
- 80°C for 6 seconds

You will need a clean food thermometer to measure these temperatures accurately.

When following a recipe take care to follow the instructions for cooking times and temperatures carefully.

Advice on cooking meat

It is important to check that meat is cooked thoroughly to protect yourself and others from [food poisoning](#).

Bacteria can be found in all raw meats but in different areas of the meat. This can change the way you can cook it, and how to check if it's been thoroughly cooked.

Cooking poultry and pork

Poultry (such as chicken, turkey, duck, and game birds) and pork can have bacteria all the way through the meat. This means that **these meats need to be cooked all the way through**.

You can use a clean food thermometer to check the meat is cooked thoroughly. Be sure to test the temperature of the meat and avoid the bones.

If you don't have a thermometer, you should use the following visual cues:

- when you cut into the thickest part of the meat, the juices should run clear - for a whole chicken or other bird, the thickest part is the leg between the drumstick and the breast
- make sure there is no pink, fleshy meat, as this is a sign it is undercooked
- cut the meat open with a clean knife to check it is steaming hot all the way through - you should see steam coming from the meat

During pregnancy you should avoid eating game birds as [game bird meat may contain lead shot](#). You can find further guidance on [foods to avoid during pregnancy on the NHS website.](#)

FSA Explains

Avian Influenza

Properly cooked poultry, game birds and other poultry products are safe to eat.

Avian Influenza (also known as bird flu) poses a very low food safety risk for UK consumers, and does not change our advice on consumption of poultry products, including eggs and game birds.

DEFRA has further advice on Avian Influenza.

For Northern Ireland specific advice on bird flu please refer to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Minced meat and offal

Any meat that has been minced or skewered all the way through should be cooked thoroughly. When a whole cut of meat is minced or skewered, this moves any bacteria from the outside all the way through the meat.

These include:

- mincemeat (any type)
- burgers
- sausages
- kebabs
- rolled joints
- kidney, liver, and other types of offal

These meats need to be cooked all the way through.

You can use a food thermometer to check the meat is cooked thoroughly. If you don't have a thermometer, you should use the following visual cues:

- check if the meat is steaming, you should see steam rising from the surface of the food, as well as the middle of the food when it is cut into
- check for colour changes - these foods will brown when cooked

Kidney, liver, and other types of offal should be cooked thoroughly until they're steaming hot all the way through.

Burgers shouldn't be served rare or pink at home. For more information on this see our advice on cooking burgers at home.

Whole cuts of meat

Whole cuts of meat, such as steaks and joints (except poultry and pork), only ever have bacteria on the outside surface of the meat. These can be served pink in the middle according to taste:

- sear the meat by using a high temperature to seal the meat and kill any bacteria that might be on the outside
- check that the meat is properly sealed by ensuring that the outside of the joint has changed colour

Advice on cooking fish and seafood

When cooking fish or seafood there are visual and sensory cues you can use to help determine if the food is cooked thoroughly:

- fish flesh should turn opaque (no longer transparent) and separates easily with a fork
- prawns, scallops, crab, and lobster flesh should become firm and opaque
- when cooking clams, mussels, and oysters the shells open during cooking - throw away any that don't open as these may have gone bad

You can also use smell to check if fish or seafood is spoiled. There is usually a very strong fishy smell if the food has gone off.

Advice on cooking frozen vegetables

Some frozen vegetables, such as sweetcorn, peas, and carrots, can contain bacteria. Frozen vegetables need to be thoroughly cooked before you can eat them.

If you intend to use frozen vegetables as part of a cold salad or smoothies, check the instructions on the packaging first. If the advice on the packaging states that the frozen vegetables should be cooked, you must ensure that this is done before they are eaten cold, or you can use tinned equivalents.

Using your leftovers

Make your food go further by using your leftovers safely. This can save you time and money and help fight food waste.

Eating leftovers cold

Leftovers can be eaten cold if they have been cooked properly, cooled, and put in the fridge within two hours. Putting food in the fridge slows bacterial growth so it is safe to eat. **Eat leftovers within 48 hours or freeze them** if you think this won't be possible.

Reheating leftovers

When food is at a temperature of between 8 - 63°C, this is called The Danger Zone. Between these temperatures the bacteria may grow and make you ill. So, for this reason it is important that food is cooked to steaming hot throughout, rather than warmed, as the high temperature will kill bacteria that may be present.

When reheating leftovers, you should only ever reheat once. This is because repeatedly changing temperatures provides more chances for bacteria to grow and cause food poisoning.

You can reheat food in the microwave, on the hob or in the oven. Cooking times will vary according to the food you are reheating and how much food you are reheating. Here are some tips to make sure you have reheated your food thoroughly:

- follow instructions on the original food packaging if available or check the microwave manufacturer's guidance on general cooking advice, including advice on stirring and standing
- it is a good idea to stir food while it is reheating - when food is microwaved, it can be very hot at the edges and still be cold in the centre, stirring helps to prevent this
- microwaves can heat in 'pockets' so stirring or turning the food helps to prevent pockets of cold food in your meal

- some leftovers, like prepared dishes such as lasagne, are better reheated in smaller portions to allow more even heating

If reheating on the hob, stir frequently and make sure the food is heated throughout.

Other ways to cook your food

Meals can also be prepared using appliances such as a microwave, slow cooker, or air fryer. Depending on the cooking method and appliance efficiency, foods will require different times and temperatures to be properly cooked. Also, while different foods can be cooked together, they may require different times and temperatures.

In some appliances, you should leave some space around the food so that it can cook properly, like with chicken legs in an air fryer.

You should use the same visual cues to check foods prepared in these ways are cooked thoroughly.

Please refer to the instructions for your appliance or on the food packet for cooking advice.