



FOOD SAFETY INFORMATION COUNCIL

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STRIKE FOOD POISONING OFF THE GIFT LIST

With the gift giving season upon us Australians are urged to ensure food poisoning isn't the memorable thing they give or receive.

Hot weather, large, multi-generation gatherings and the rush of the holiday season create a perfect storm for food poisoning, warns Dr Michael Eyles, Food Safety Information Council Chairman.

"So amongst gift buying, entertaining and having fun during the next few weeks, we need to place food safety as a priority," Dr Eyles says.

"The statistics show food poisoning should never be taken lightly.

"OzFoodNet, which monitors foodborne illnesses in Australia, estimates 5.4 million cases of food poisoning annually. While most people will recover in a few days, hospitalisation, triggering of chronic, long-term diseases, and even death, can result. The most at risk are the vulnerable populations: the elderly, the young, pregnant women and those with compromised immune systems"

"Such suffering would certainly ruin the holiday season. The risk of you, your family or friends being a food poisoning victim can be minimised by following the Council's simple food safety tips," Dr Eyles says.

The Food Safety Information Council tips are: **Choose, Clean, Chill, Cook and Separate.**

Dr Eyles says applying these to the holiday season is easy.

"Choose a manageable menu.

"Deciding whether you actually need a whole, large turkey or not is a good starting point - perhaps just a breast or other cuts is enough and will decrease the food safety risks as they will be easier to store, prepare and cook. There will also be less leftovers to worry about.

"Share the menu planning with family and friends so they don't arrive with unexpected cream filled desserts, seafood or other items which will need fridge space.

"Clean out the fridge so there's plenty of room to store food. Make sure the kitchen benches, cooking utensils and all hands that will touch the food are clean.

"Chill food well in a refrigerator set at 5° or below. The temperature danger zone – between 5 and 60 degrees – is where food poisoning bacteria grow best.

"Have plenty of ice in a container so drinks don't need fridge space. Getting drinks out of the fridge has huge benefits. There will be more room in the fridge to store perishable foods, and the cold air circulates to better maintain the required temperature.

"Also, the fridge door will be opened less often, and the drinks container filled with ice can be strategically placed to minimise the kitchen traffic – fewer people underfoot allows the cook to be less hassled and therefore more likely to follow the basic food safety tips.

“If fish and seafood is your choice, ask your fishmonger to pack your purchase with ice, transport it home in a cooler and then store it in the fridge as soon as possible.

“When defrosting a frozen turkey make sure to follow the instructions on the packaging. Remember a whole turkey could take several days to defrost, so plan ahead.

Dr Eyles says leftovers are another challenge, so they are best minimised through good menu planning.

He suggests if you do have perishable leftovers remember the 2-4-OUT rule:

- 2 hours unrefrigerated is generally OK as long as the food is not sitting in the sun.
- 2 to 4 hours unrefrigerated can be risky. The chance of leftovers causing food poisoning increases if the food is not very fresh when originally served; contains ingredients such as dairy products, or raw eggs; or has been exposed to heat sources, such as the sun. Particular care must be taken with leftovers if they will be eaten later by young children, older people, or those pregnant or unwell.
- 4 hours or more unrefrigerated – throw it OUT.

“Ham will keep well with proper handling. Remove it from its plastic wrap, cover with a clean cloth soaked in water and vinegar so it doesn’t dry out. Store it in the fridge. Reduced salt hams are now becoming popular but will not last as long as old-style, high salt hams so follow instructions on the packaging. If a large amount of ham is leftover cut off a chunk and freeze it for later use.

“**Separate** foods, particularly meats and poultry, from those that won’t be cooked, such as salad vegetables, to minimise cross-contamination. Such foods should be separated at all stages including in shopping bags, on benchtops and in the fridge. Cooked meats and poultry should never be put back on the plate with raw juices, nor should marinade be served as a sauce.

“Well organised kitchens and fridges make separating food easier, lessening the risk of juices from meats and poultry contaminating other foods.

“**Cook** food properly, making sure large items such as turkeys are cooked right through. A meat thermometer is an excellent idea.

“The gift of good health is something everyone appreciates, with the only cost being the small attention to detail to ensure the basics of good hygiene and food handling safety tips are followed,” Dr Eyles concludes.

The Food Safety Information Council is Australia’s leading disseminator of consumer targeted food safety information. It is a non-profit entity supported by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, state and territory health and food safety agencies, local government, and leading professional, industry and community organisations.

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FURTHER INFORMATION: www.foodsafety.asn.au

NOTE: Pronunciation of ‘Eyles’: as for ‘British Isles’, or ‘supermarket aisles’.