

FOOD SAFETY MYTHS

Mishandled food can mean serious consequences including food borne illness. So let's take a moment to look at some common misunderstandings.

Many believe that food prepared at home is safer than that from restaurants. But in fact, it is often the other way around. The problem is that most people use poor food-handling techniques at home; while most professional food handlers have training in safe handling techniques. Truthfully, you or those that have eaten your food have probably gotten sick from it, but the illness was mistaken for the flu or linked to food eaten at a restaurant. So it is important that you educate yourself in safe food handling practices and start implementing them immediately.

Another common mistake is believing that food should be left out to cool completely before being put into the refrigerator for storage. The truth is, food left out to cool is more likely to either start the accumulation of harmful bacteria or spoil. The best thing to do is place your leftovers in a smaller container and leave it uncovered in the refrigerator until it reaches 45 degrees Fahrenheit and then place a cover on the container. Just remember, cool food as quickly as possible to avoid harmful bacteria growth, don't leave it out to cool!

Microwaved food has created many myths. But perhaps the most harmful is the idea that microwaving food kills the bacteria making it safe. It is most likely that this is a myth derived from the fact that we are told to cook food thoroughly to kill harmful bacteria. Cooking food thoroughly is important, however it is important to realize microwave cooking often leaves cold spots in food. These cold or lukewarm spots in the food are the areas that bacteria can survive in. It is possible to avoid this problem by covering food with a lid or plastic wrap, with holes for ventilation. Also, make sure to rotate and stir food several times during cooking. A food thermometer is a great way to assure that your food is cooked completely. Insert the thermometer into the center for a more accurate reading.

There will always be food preparation, handling and storage myths so it is important to stay well informed.