



PREPARATION

It's very important to prepare food safely, to help stop harmful bacteria from spreading and growing.

Wash your hands



Your hands can easily spread bacteria around the kitchen and onto food. This is why it's important to always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water at each of these times:

- before starting to prepare food
- after touching raw meat, including poultry
- after going to the toilet
- after touching the bin
- after touching pets

Don't forget to dry your hands thoroughly as well, because if they are wet they will spread bacteria more easily.

Keep worktops clean

Before you start preparing food, it's important to make sure that your worktops, kitchen utensils and chopping boards are clean. If they've been touched by raw meat, poultry or eggs, you'll need to wash them thoroughly.

Don't forget to change dish cloths and tea towels regularly. They may look clean, but they're the perfect place for bacteria to grow.

Separate raw meat/fish from ready-to-eat food



Raw meat and fish contain harmful bacteria that can spread very easily to anything they touch, including other foods, worktops, chopping boards and knives.

It's especially important to keep raw meat and fish away from ready-to-eat food, such as salad, fruit and bread. This is because these types of food won't be cooked before you eat them, so any bacteria that get onto the food won't be killed.

To help stop bacteria from spreading, remember these things:

- Don't let raw meat or fish touch other food.
- Never prepare ready-to-eat food using a chopping board or knife that you have used to prepare raw meat or fish, unless they have been washed thoroughly first.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw meat or fish and before you touch anything else.
- Always cover raw meat or fish and store them on the bottom shelf of the fridge where they can't touch or drip onto other foods.
- Don't wash raw meat before cooking it. Washing doesn't get rid of harmful bacteria – the only way to do this is by cooking the food thoroughly. If you wash raw meat or fish you also run the risk of splashing bacteria onto worktops and utensils.

Check the label

Another important stage when you're preparing food – to help keep you and your family safe – is to have a look at the food labels to make sure everything you're going to use has been stored correctly (according to any storage instructions) and that none of the food is past its 'use by' date.

You will find that food that goes off quickly usually has storage instructions on the label that say how long you can keep the food and whether it needs to go in the fridge.

This sort of food often has special packaging to help keep it fresh for longer. But it will go off quickly once you've opened it. This is why the storage instructions also tell you how long the food will keep once the packaging has been opened. For example, you might see 'eat within 2 days of opening' on the label.

You will also see 'use by' dates on food that goes off quickly. You shouldn't use any food after the 'use by' date even if the food looks and smells fine, because it might contain harmful bacteria.

'Best before' dates are more about quality than safety, so when the date runs out it doesn't mean that the food will make you ill, but it might begin to lose its flavour and texture. One exception to this is eggs, which you shouldn't eat after the 'best before' date.

If you are preparing poultry yourself

Most of the poultry and game you find on sale in the UK has been gutted before you buy it.

This means the intestines and other internal organs (the innards) have already been removed.

However, farmers who slaughter fewer than 10,000 birds a year are allowed to sell poultry and farmed game birds that haven't had their innards removed.

You might find this type of poultry and farmed game birds on sale directly from a farm, or in a local market. Wild game birds, such as pheasants, that have not been gutted, might also be on sale.

Risks from gutting poultry and game birds at home

Removing the guts and other internal organs from poultry and game birds in the home carries the increased risk of contaminating kitchen worktops and equipment with harmful bacteria.

If a bird's stomach or intestine ruptures during removal, bacteria can spread from the contents of the guts. This could contaminate the meat - or other foods - and cause food poisoning.

General advice

It is always better to ask your supplier to gut the poultry or game bird for you, when you buy it.

If this is not possible we recommend that you take these precautions:

- use an insulated cool bag to transport the carcass home
- get the poultry or game into a fridge quickly - ideally within 1-2 hours
- store raw poultry or game away from cooked food
- put raw poultry or game at the bottom of the fridge to avoid it dripping on to other food
- always wash your hands, using warm water and soap, after handling raw meat, poultry or game, and before touching other food
- clean the preparation area thoroughly before and after you start gutting the bird

When gutting poultry or a game bird

- handle and remove the innards well away from other foods to avoid contamination of worktops and other foods
- use disposable cloths, paper towels and disposable gloves whenever possible
- the guts should be removed carefully from the rear of the bird and the heart from the neck
- avoid rupturing the intestines and spilling the contents of the gut
- keep work surfaces and equipment clean and dry during use

After gutting poultry or game

- don't wash poultry or game-bird meat because any splashing might spread bacteria around the kitchen
- wipe blood clots off the bird with paper kitchen roll
- dispose of removed innards and any other inedible material carefully in a waste bin - place it in a sealed container before disposing of it
- wash utensils and work surfaces thoroughly in warm soapy water after use and, if possible, disinfect them
- wash your hands thoroughly in warm soapy water after handling raw poultry and dry thoroughly