Food safety means storing and preparing foods properly. This lowers your risk of food-borne illness caused by food contaminated with bacteria, viruses, molds, or parasites. Follow these guidelines to help avoid food-borne illnesses.

**Grocery Shopping**
- Shop at stores that maintain high sanitary standards for both the facility and its staff.
- Shop for refrigerated and frozen foods last to prevent them from warming up while you shop.
- Place raw meat, poultry, and seafood in plastic bags. Keep them separate from other foods in your shopping cart and grocery bags.
- Do not buy food with damaged packaging.
- Do not use foods after their expiration date.
- Avoid foods in bulk containers such as nuts, candies, or granola, unless you will be cooking them before eating.
- Do not purchase precut vegetables or fruits unless you will cook them before eating.
- Use only pasteurized milk and cheese products. Look for the word *pasteurized* on the label.
- Avoid unpasteurized, fresh-squeezed juices and cider. Frozen concentrates, juice in airtight sealed containers, and canned juices are processed to eliminate harmful bacteria.
- Avoid unpasteurized or raw honey.
- Avoid Camembert, Brie, feta, and blue mold cheeses.
- Avoid raw sprouts such as alfalfa, clover, and radish.
- Select fruits and vegetables that look fresh. Do not choose fruits and vegetables that are moldy, bruised, or damaged.
- Do not select food displayed in an unsafe way, such as cooked fish on the same bed of ice with raw fish, or samples left out on a counter.
- Put away chilled and frozen foods as quickly as possible. Carrying food around in the car for even a couple of hours can allow bacteria to grow.

**Food Storage and Handling**
- Keep refrigerated food at or below 40°F and frozen food at or below 0°F. Refrigerator and freezer thermometers are available at most supermarkets.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood separate from other foods in your refrigerator, and while preparing and handling foods.
- Keep fresh eggs refrigerated in their original container.
- Keep shelves, countertops, refrigerators, freezers, utensils, sponges, and towels clean.
- Use separate, labeled cutting boards for raw meat and for fruits and vegetables.
- Use caution with wood cutting boards and discard them if they become heavily worn with cracks or grooves.
- Wash cutting boards in the dishwasher or with hot, soapy water after each use. Sanitize with a bleach solution (one teaspoon liquid chlorine bleach per quart of water).
- Wash produce with water and a brush before peeling, slicing, cooking, or eating.
- Wash leaves of vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, and cabbage individually under lukewarm water.
- Rinse prepackaged salads or vegetables even if the label says *prewashed*.
- Wipe tops of cans with a clean cloth before opening.
- Thaw frozen meats in the refrigerator or microwave, not at room temperature.
- Store leftovers on the top shelves of the refrigerator and raw foods on the lower shelves.
- Do not overfill refrigerator or freezer shelves. This assures all foods will be properly cooled.

**Food Preparation**
- Wash your hands before preparing meals or snacks.
- Cover cuts or sores on the hand with a plastic bandage or glove while preparing food.
- Do not taste food that looks or smells like it might have gone bad.
• When cooking meat, place the cooked meat on a clean plate. Do not use the same plate that held the raw meat.
• Cook food items that contain eggs thoroughly. Use a pasteurized egg product instead of raw eggs in homemade Caesar salad dressing, ice cream, and mayonnaise.
• Follow time instructions on food packaging when cooking with a microwave oven.

Eating Out
• Ask your doctor when it is safe for you to dine out or eat take-out foods.
• When choosing a restaurant, look for cleanliness of staff, restrooms, dishes, and silverware.
• Dine during off-peak hours and ask for an isolated table.
• Avoid salad bars, potlucks, sidewalk vendors, delicatessens, and buffets.
• Follow the same food restrictions you follow at home when you go out to eat. Ask about ingredients before ordering.
• Ask for well-done meats, fish, and poultry. Check by cutting into the center of a piece of meat. If it is bloody or pink, send it back for more cooking.
• Fish should be flaky, not rubbery, when cut.
• Avoid raw meat, poultry, and fish such as oysters on the half-shell, raw clams, sushi, and sashimi. Foods made with raw fish are more likely to contain parasites or bacteria than foods made from cooked fish.
• Avoid raw fruits and vegetables when eating out.
• Make sure fruit and vegetable juices are pasteurized, not fresh-squeezed.
• Do not use public self-serve condiments. Ask for individual condiment packets or for an unopened container that you can open yourself.
• In fast-food restaurants, ask that your food be prepared fresh.
• Ask your server to deliver your meal as soon as it is prepared.
• Refrigerate any leftovers promptly. Discard if they have been sitting out for more than an hour.
• Do not use restaurant delivery services. The food may be in transit too long.
• Use caution when traveling abroad. Select cooked foods that are served hot, and avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products, raw meat and seafood, raw vegetables, and fresh fruit unless you clean and peel it yourself.

Cook and Store Food at Safe Temperatures
Bacteria can grow to dangerous levels in food left out too long at room temperature. Bacteria grow most rapidly between 40 °F and 140 °F, doubling in number in as little as 20 minutes. This temperature range is often called the “Danger Zone.”
• Do not allow foods to stand at room temperature for more than two hours. When temperatures are above 90°F (32°C), shorten this time to one hour.
• Heat prepackaged meats such as hot dogs, sliced roast beef, turkey, and chicken breasts until they are steaming hot (165°F).
• Cook eggs so both yolk and white are firm, not runny.
• Do not keep raw meats or leftovers in the refrigerator for more than three days. If you will not be eating foods within this time, you can freeze them.

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Water

• Do not use unchlorinated water. If your water source is a well, contact the health department for information about well tests. Ask if the well is at risk for contamination. The risk is higher if construction, flooding, or spring runoff occur near the well, or if the well is shallow or near livestock.
• Use bottled water if you have any doubts about the quality of your tap water.
• Drink only bottled water when traveling abroad. Do not use ice in any beverage unless it was made from boiled or bottled water.

Food Safety During Power Outages
During a power outage, the biggest challenge is keeping the refrigerator temperature below 40°F and the freezer temperature below 0°F.
• Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain cold temperatures. A full freezer will stay below 0°F for about 48 hours (24 hours if only half-full).
• Use dry ice or block ice to help keep your freezer and refrigerator cold. Fifty pounds of dry ice will keep a full 18-cubic-foot freezer below 0°F for two days.
• Assess the food once the power is back on. Refrigerated foods are safe as long as power was not out for more than four hours. Discard all leftovers, meat, poultry, eggs, or fish that have been above 40°F for more than two hours. Even after thorough cooking, meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs that have exceeded 40°F during storage may cause illness.
• For information on handling foods during power outages, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.

Food Safety During Floods
• If flooding has occurred, check the safety of your water supply and food.
• Wash fruits and vegetables with a safe water source.
• Use bottled water if you are not sure about the water’s safety. Listen to local news for information on the safety of local water supplies.

• Boil water for one to three minutes if bottled water is not available. Water-purifying tablets are also helpful.
• If you cannot boil water, add eight drops of newly purchased, unscented liquid household bleach per gallon of water. Stir the water and bleach well, and let it stand for 30 minutes before drinking it or cooking with it. Bleach kills bacteria in the water, but will not kill parasitic organisms.
• Thoroughly wash metal or ceramic pans, dishes, and utensils with soap and hot water and sanitize for 15 minutes using boiling water and bleach (¼ cup bleach to 1 gallon water).
• Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with floodwater. Undamaged commercially canned foods can be saved by removing the label, washing the can, and disinfecting it with a solution of ¼ cup bleach to 1 gallon of water. Relabel the can. Discard home-canned foods that have come into contact with floodwater.

Call your doctor and local health department if you get sick from food.

For more information, visit www.foodsafety.gov or call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration toll free at 1-888-723-3366.