



THE GRADE-A GUIDE TO SAFE MEAT HANDLING

FEARLESS  FRESH

from STEPHANIE STIAVETTI

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I KNOW YOU WANT TO GET TO THE FUN COOKING PART, but first things first: Meat safety. It's important that we cover the basics of storing raw meat, because ultimately this is the first place things can go wrong.

It's no secret that meat goes bad if you leave it at room temperature for long enough. This happens because uninvited guests called pathogens grow inside meat if the conditions are right, and the conditions pathogens LOVE are warm, moist environments. When it's left out of the fridge, meat is the perfect home for bacteria, fungi, and other nasties, who then move in and trash the place. Ugh. This goes for both raw and cooked meat.

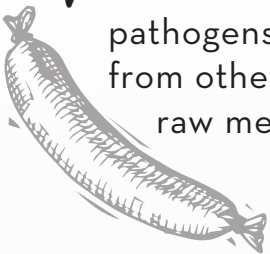


Thankfully, meat safety is as simple as keeping it sealed, keeping it cold, keeping it separate, and making sure you eat it within a certain timeline. (Because even kept in the fridge, meat will eventually go bad. You know, biology and all that.)

There's no reason to be afraid of cooking meat, but be especially careful when cooking for young children, pregnant women, older adults, or anyone else with a compromised immune system. If meat-borne pathogens can make a healthy adult very sick, imagine what they can do to weaker individuals.

THE RULES

- ✓ You need to keep raw meat away from other foods at all times. No exceptions, and that includes raw meat juices. Here are some basic rules.
- ✓ Besides carrying around its own host of freeloaders, raw meat can spread pathogens to food around it. So make sure you're keeping your meat separate from other foods, especially foods that will be eaten raw. That means no storing raw meat in the same packages as other foods.



- ✓ Keep other foods far away from the area you're preparing or cutting raw meat. If other foods are closeby, cover them well with plastic wrap to avoid contamination. You'd be surprised how far and wide a good splatter of raw meat juice can travel.
- ✓ If you've got raw meat sitting on the counter, waiting for the next step, place it in a bowl and cover it with plastic to keep the juices from getting everywhere.
- ✓ Don't wash raw meat. Studies show that washing meat does not remove any additional bacteria, and in fact is more likely to spread it around the kitchen, which increased your chances of getting sick.
- ✓ If you end up with meat juice spilled or splattered on the counter, the wall, or anywhere else, no big deal. Just use a disinfectant such as Formula 409 or bleach spray to clean it up.
- ✓ Avoid giving raw meat to pets, unless you're 100% sure of the quality of the meat. Sure, it seems like a good idea because cats and dogs eat raw meat in the wild, right? Well, their digestive systems aren't set up to handle feedlot meat, which has been raised in factory farming conditions and fed hormones and antibiotics. The same pathogens that can hurt you and me can also make your little fuzzbutt sick.
- ✓ For more on safe meat storage, check out *Super Fresh: Storing Meat Like A Pro*, in the resource library.



WASH YOUR HANDS!!

First and foremost, you need to handle meat responsibly. That means washing your hands before touching raw meat, and washing your hands immediately after you're done handling it— before you do anything else! A huge number of meat-based illnesses happen because people touch contaminated raw meat and then touch the refrigerator door, their water glass, other foods, etc.



This is why you must wash your hands as soon as you put the meat down, even if you know you're going to pick it back up again a few minutes later. And for the love of god, please don't handle raw meat and then go sticking your meat-covered fingers in your eyes, nose, or mouth. That's just all kinds of bad juju.

PROTIP: HAND WASHING LIKE A CHEF.

Yes, there's a specific way you need to wash your hands when cooking, especially before and after handling raw meat. Here's how chefs do it in pro kitchens:

- » Run the water until it's as hot as you can tolerate comfortably.
- » Wet your hands well in the hot water, and turn off the tap. Add some soap.
- » This is the important part: rub your hands together to create a good lather, making sure to scrub the tops, bottoms, and sides of your hands, between your fingers, around your nail beds, and under the nails. Don't just rub your palms together - make sure to get every inch of skin.
- » You want to scrub your hands for 20 seconds, which is generally the same amount of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song in your head, twice. Yes, this is what they tell us to do in professional kitchens. ;)
- » Rinse your hands with hot water and dry them well on a clean towel.

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