

Cook it!

Cooking is the final and most critical step in ensuring safety. Bacteria are found on the outside of meat and poultry — the inside is sterile. But when ground, the outside is mixed into the inside. For these reasons, ground products must be cooked thoroughly. That's why hamburgers must be cooked until well done.

When preparing ground meat and poultry like hamburgers and turkey burgers, use products by the “use by” date on the package. Cook them to the following internal temperatures:

Ground beef or pork	160°F
Ground poultry	165°F
All leftovers	165°F

These temperatures should be validated using a digital thermometer, available in most kitchen supply stores. These thermometers must be inserted and removed in 10 to 15 seconds to get a temperature reading; they may not be left in during cooking. Oven proof thermometers — like the ones inserted into roasts — may, however, remain in during cooking.



New research has shown that color is NOT a reliable indicator of doneness; a burger that's brown in the middle is not necessarily cooked thoroughly. Only a thermometer can provide reliable information.

One special note on color: Fresh ground beef goes through a number of color changes during its shelf life. Look for ground beef with a bright red color, but don't be surprised if the center appears brown. This color difference is due to exposure to oxygen, which causes naturally brown ground beef to turn red. Extended exposure to air, however, reduces the normal shelf life of the product. Color changes are normal, and ground beef remains wholesome and safe to eat within one to two days of purchase.

Some irradiated products are available in the market today. They are indicated by a label on the package that says “treated with irradiation.” These products have been treated with energy that destroys harmful bacteria like *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella*, while allowing harmless, natural bacteria to remain. In this way, the food is not sterilized, which maintains the traditional fresh and delicious taste consumers enjoy. While irradiation offers a remarkably high margin of safety, consumers are urged to cook irradiated products just as they would non-irradiated products: *thoroughly*.



A Consumer Guide



to Safe Handling of Ground Meat and Poultry

Cool it!
Store it!
Clean it!
Separate it!
Cook it!
Enjoy!

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NATIONAL CHICKEN COUNCIL

NATIONAL TURKEY FEDERATION

U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline:
1-800-535-4555

Safe Handling of Ground Meat and Poultry



Ground beef, pork and poultry are among the most popular choices in the meat and poultry case. New meat and poultry processing technologies have reduced harmful bacteria on these products to remarkably low levels, according to USDA data.

However, no fresh product — from burgers to broccoli — is bacteria free. And because you can't see, smell or taste bacteria, it's always safest to assume that harmful bacteria may be present and then handle and cook accordingly.

By following a few simple rules, you can ensure that meat and poultry are safe — all the way to the table.



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Protecting and Promoting Health with an Ounce of Prevention

Cool it!

Ground meat and poultry are more perishable than most foods. In the danger zone between 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F, bacteria can multiply rapidly.

- When shopping, put meat and poultry in your cart last.
- Choose products that are cold and tightly wrapped.
- Transport meat and poultry home from the store quickly and refrigerate or freeze immediately.
- If your trip home will take more than an hour, bring along a cooler to keep meat and poultry cold.
- Keep refrigerator set at 40 degrees F or below and freezers set at zero degrees or below.
- Defrost in the refrigerator or microwave to prevent bacterial growth.

Store it!

- The shelf life for uncooked ground meat and poultry is one to two days; three to four days once cooked.
- In a freezer set at zero degrees or less, uncooked meat and poultry may be stored for three to four months. Cooked meat and poultry may be stored for up to four months.

Clean it!

Keep everything clean — hands, utensils, counters, cutting boards and sinks — to ensure that food stays safe.

- Always wash hands thoroughly in hot, soapy water before and after preparing foods and handling raw meat or poultry.
- Wash utensils that have touched raw meat or poultry with hot, soapy water.
- Wash counters, cutting boards and other surfaces raw meat or poultry have touched.
- Keep the inside of your refrigerator clean by washing it inside and out every month.

Separate it!

Cross-contaminating raw and cooked foods can cause a major kitchen calamity. Take the following preventive steps:

- DO NOT let raw meat and poultry juices touch ready-to-eat foods.
- DO NOT put cooked foods on a plate that held raw beef or poultry.
- DO NOT pour marinade that touched raw meat and poultry over cooked meat and poultry.
- Wash cutting boards between uses with hot soapy water or consider buying two cutting boards — one for fruits and vegetables and one for meat, poultry and seafood.