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## Hygiene Fact File



The microbes on our food that can cause food poisoning are usually controlled by heating (cooking) and/or chilling (refrigerating) our food, but given the chance they can easily spread around the kitchen - via our hands, chopping boards, cloths, knives and other utensils.

If they are allowed to cross-contaminate other foods – especially cooked and ready-to-eat foods – they can make us ill. Good kitchen hygiene and good personal hygiene are important to help control the spread of harmful germs.

More information on food hygiene can be found on the Food Standards Agency website – [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk).

### **Kitchen hygiene**

Clean kitchen surfaces after preparing foods. Try to 'clean as you go'. Remember that raw meat, poultry, fish and other raw foods can easily cross-contaminate other foods. After handling these foods always wash hands, utensils and surfaces thoroughly and before any contact with other food, especially cooked and ready-to-eat foods.

After use, wash all crockery and utensils with hot water and washing up liquid. Change the water regularly then rinse in clean, hot water. Where possible leave to drain until dry. Tea towels can be a source of cross-contamination so use them sparingly; make sure they dry out after you've used them, change them regularly and wash in a hot wash cycle. Preferably, use disposable cloths or paper towels.

If you have a dishwasher use the right amounts of salt and detergent and keep the filter and all surfaces clean. The highest temperature cycle will be most effective against germs.

Keep all food cupboards clean, cool, tidy and dry. When you take cans from the cupboard, before opening wipe over the tops to remove any dust. And don't forget to clean the can opener.

Give your kitchen a thorough 'spring clean' periodically.

## *Cleaning materials*

Use the right materials for the job:

- Detergents such as washing up liquids are designed to dissolve grease, oil and dirt.
- Disinfectants, such as bleach, are designed to kill germs. These are powerful agents and should not be used indiscriminately.
- Anti-bacterial cleaners are types of disinfectant and can kill germs. They often come in spray form.

Disinfectants and anti-bacterial cleaners won't work if you don't use them properly, so always follow the instructions.

Always clean surfaces first with detergent to remove any grease and dirt, then apply disinfectant to kill any remaining germs.

Use separate cloths or sponges for separate tasks; where practicable use disposable cloths. If using them more than once, wash in hot water and soap then place in a suitable disinfectant, rinse thoroughly and allow to dry. Do not soak overnight as disinfectant solutions weaken and may allow bacteria to grow.

## *Rubbish*

Kitchen rubbish bins are an obvious breeding ground for germs, so empty them regularly - especially in the summer. Use a lidded bin and a bin liner. Tie up the rubbish bags before removing them to avoid food waste spilling onto the floor. Even with a liner, bins get dirty so clean them out with hot water and disinfectant at regular intervals.

## *Pests and pets*

Make sure that insects, birds and rodents are kept out of the kitchen and throw out any food they come into contact with. To control flies and wasps hang up an insecticidal strip (do not use aerosol sprays in the kitchen) and use traps for mice and rats. If the problem is serious, or if you have an infestation of cockroaches, ants or other pests, you might need to seek professional advice from your local environmental health department or a commercial pest control agency.

As much as we love our pets they do carry germs. Keep them - and their feeding bowls - away from your food and food preparation areas and wash your hands after touching them. Give pets their own feeding bowls and clean these separately from other utensils.

## Personal hygiene

### *When to wash hands*

Some germs can stay alive on our hands for up to three hours and in that time they can be spread to all the things we touch – including food and other people. So wash your hands regularly throughout the day and especially at these times:

#### Before:

- Preparing food
- Eating
- Caring for the sick; changing dressings, giving medicines
- Looking after babies or the elderly
- Starting work; especially if you are a food handler or health professional
- Putting in contact lenses

#### Between:

- Handling raw foods (meat, fish, poultry and eggs) and touching any other food or kitchen utensils

#### After:

- Handling raw foods, particularly meat, fish, and poultry
- Going to the toilet
- Touching rubbish/waste bins
- Changing nappies
- Caring for the sick, especially those with gastro-intestinal disorders
- Coughing or sneezing, especially if you are sick
- Handling and stroking pets or farm animals
- Gardening - even if you wear gloves
- Cleaning cat litter boxes

#### Did you know?

- The number of germs on fingertips doubles after using the toilet. Yet up to half of all men and a quarter of women fail to wash their hands after they've been to the toilet!

## How to wash hands

We all think we know how to wash our hands but many of us don't do it properly.



- Areas most frequently missed during hand washing
- Less frequently missed
- Not missed

(Adapted from Taylor L (1978), *An evaluation of hand washing techniques - I*, *Nursing Times*, 12 January, pp 54-55)

Simply rinsing the tips of fingertips under cold water does NOT count. Here are some reminders:

- Always use warm water. It's better to wet hands before applying soap as this prevents irritation.
- Rub hands together vigorously for about 15 seconds, making sure both sides of the hands are washed thoroughly, around the thumbs, between each finger and around and under the nails.
- Then, rinse with clean water.
- Germs spread more easily if hands are wet so dry them thoroughly. Use a clean dry towel, paper towel or air dryer; it doesn't matter which.

### Did you know?

- 1,000 times as many germs spread from damp hands than dry hands.

### *Other personal hygiene tips*

If you are ill, especially with any gastrointestinal problems, avoid handling foods for others. Don't sneeze or cough near foods.

Cover all cuts, burns and sores and change dressings regularly – pay extra attention to any open wounds on hands and arms.

Avoid working in the kitchen in soiled clothing - when cooking, use a clean apron but don't use it to wipe your hands on.

If you are preparing lots of food – for a family meal perhaps - take off your watch, rings and bracelets as well as washing your hands and wrists before you start.

#### Did you know?

- If you wear a ring there could be as many germs under it as there are people in Europe. Millions of germs can also hide under watches and bracelets.

Don't brush or comb your hair when you are in the kitchen or near food.

#### Did you know?

- A 1mm hair follicle can harbour 50,000 germs

Do not cough, sneeze, spit or smoke near food and avoid touching your nose, teeth, ears and hair, or scratching when handling food.

### *When extra care is needed*

If you work as a food handler you should take extra precautions – and these might be required by your employer. It's best to keep nails short and not to use artificial nails or nail varnish. Always use waterproof dressings to cover any cuts or sores.

Healthcare professionals and others who look after the sick also need to take extra care. Antiseptic or alcohol based hand washing solutions provide extra safety.

### *Extra care for babies*

Keep the kitchen extra clean – especially the floor where babies love to crawl.

Wipe high chairs, bibs and eating areas before and after every meal.

Keep dirty nappies away from food and food preparation areas and always wash hands after handling dirty nappies.

Teach young children about hand washing and good hygiene habits from an early age.