



LEFTOVER FOOD AND REHEATING SAFETY

Safety Tips for Leftover Food

When cooking a meal, it's always best to try and cook enough for just that meal. However, when there are leftovers it's important to handle them safely because the chance for contamination and illness increases. Leftovers include food that has been cooked, possibly hot held, and then cooled down and refrigerated. The concern in using leftovers is the amount of time the food spends in the Temperature Danger Zone when cooling and reheating and the increased chance for food to be exposed to

sources of contamination. It's important that food is cooled using proper cooling methods and stored uncovered and on the top shelf in the refrigerator at 4°C (40°F) or less. Once completely cooled, food should be covered and stored in the middle shelf of the refrigerator. When handling leftovers make sure you wash your hands and use utensils and surfaces that have been cleaned and sanitized. Ideally, leftovers should be used within 2 to 3 days or frozen for later use.



Proper Reheating Method

Throughout the entire process of cooking, cooling, and reheating, food passes through the Temperature Danger Zone three times. This gives disease-causing bacteria that may be in the food opportunity to grow and possibly reach unsafe levels which may make people sick. Therefore, it's recommended that food is only reheated once to reduce the risk in using leftovers. The food needs to be reheated to 74°C (165°F) or higher and hold this temperature for at least 15 seconds. A probe thermometer is to be used to check if the correct internal temperature of the food has been reached. The food should achieve the reheating temperature within two hours (this is to ensure that possible bacteria are not allowed to grow in the Temperature Danger Zone for too long).



Reheating Tips

- Portion your leftovers and only reheat what you plan to use immediately.
- Smaller portions will reheat faster (remember, food must be reheated in less than 2 hours).
- Microwaves heat unevenly so use a thermometer to make sure all areas of the food have been reheated to the correct temperature.
- After reheating, if food is to be held hot, ensure that food stays hot at 60°C (140°F) or higher.
- Stir liquids to make sure all areas of the food are being heated evenly.
- Throw out any leftovers that have been reheated and not used.
- Never use hot holding units in attempt to reheat food. These units are used to keep hot foods hot and aren't capable of reaching high enough temperatures to reheat foods correctly. Foods are to be reheated first and then placed in the unit to remain hot.



References:

- BC Centre for Disease. (2009). Ensuring food safety: Writing your own food safety plan – the HACCP way. A guide for food service operators. Food Protection Services. Retrieved from <http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/1A068D5D-3350-4D1C-A356-D8C6D62B7DB9/0/EnsuringFoodSafetyHACCPWay.pdf>
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