

1. What causes food poisoning?

Food poisoning is usually caused by micro-organisms (germs), including bacteria, viruses and moulds. The spread of these germs can be prevented by practising good food hygiene. The most serious types of food poisoning are caused by bacteria. Bacteria multiply best in a moist environment between 5°C and 63°C. Just a single bacterium on an item of food, left out of the fridge overnight, could generate many millions of bacteria by the morning, enough to make you ill if eaten. Storing food below 5°C prevents bacteria from multiplying, and cooking food at temperatures over 70°C will kill off any existing bacteria.

2. How do I become ill?

Food poisoning from bacteria can occur in different ways. Some bacteria release poisons called toxins, which may give you symptoms of food poisoning soon after the food is eaten. Other bacteria multiply in the body first before causing symptoms.

3. How can I improve hygiene?

Maintaining high levels of personal and kitchen hygiene are important and effective ways to stop germs from spreading. For example: Wash your hands and nails with hot, soapy water before handling food, between handling cooked and uncooked foods, and after going to the toilet, use different cloths for different jobs (e.g. washing up and cleaning surfaces), wash them regularly on the hot cycle & soak in a dilute solution of bleach and don't handle food if you have stomach problems such as diarrhoea and vomiting, or if you're sneezing or coughing frequently.

4. How do I store food correctly?

It's very important that food is stored in the right place (e.g. fridge or freezer) and at the correct temperature. For example: Always check labels for guidance on where and how long to store food, in particular, fresh or frozen food, allow meal leftovers to cool to room temperature before storing them in the fridge, ideally within two hours of preparation. If necessary, divide leftovers into smaller portions to help food cool more quickly, store raw food such as meat in airtight containers at the bottom of the fridge to prevent juices or blood from dripping onto other food & defrost frozen foods in the fridge. Place them on a plate or in a container as they defrost so they don't drip on or contaminate other foods.