

IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

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Making the Most of Microwave Ovens

Microwave ovens have created a more convenient and easy way to defrost, cook, and reheat food. For this reason, it is not surprising that about 90% of American kitchens contain a microwave. Because microwave ovens are used often, it is important to know how to properly use them to ensure food safety.



Is food healthy once it is microwaved?

Microwaves cook food fast while using little water. By steaming vegetables in the microwave, much of the color and nutrients are preserved.

A way to steam vegetables in the microwave is to first wash them and pat them dry. Then, cover tightly in a microwave-safe bowl and cook it for the same amount of time it would take to steam.

It may worry some people that microwaves emit radiation, however, they emit similar radiation as a laptop and cell phone. The level of exposure also drops the further you move away. The Food and Drug Administration carefully regulates the amount of radiation emitted to ensure the use of microwaves remain safe and you can continue to use a healthful and convenient cooking method.

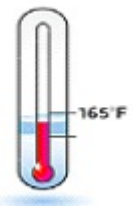
Safely defrosting, cooking, and reheating

The only way to ensure foods are at a safe internal temperature is to measure them with a thermometer in the thickest parts of food. It may even be beneficial to take the temperature of various parts of the food. There are a few things that can be done to eliminate cold spots in food where harmful bacteria can grow. Stirring and turning food containers midway as well as allowing food

to stand for cooking to be completed are ways to ensure proper food temperature.

When thawing food, make sure to press the defrost button on the microwave rather than only using a specific time for heating. Food may enter into a temperature that allows harmful bacteria to grow if not monitored. Food should be removed from packaging when defrosting to make sure harmful chemicals from non-microwavable containers do not leak into food. If you are defrosting meat, poultry, egg casseroles, and fish, cook immediately after defrosting to keep harmful bacteria from multiplying. When reheating, food should be covered in a microwave-safe container to allow for even heating

The following are safe minimal internal temperatures that should be taken with a food thermometer as determined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):

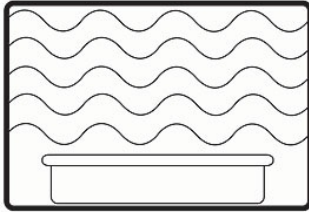


- Raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to 145 °F before removing from the heat source; let meat rest for three minutes before carving or consuming
- Raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal cooked to 160 °F
- Poultry cooked to 165 °F
- Cook stuffing separately to 165 °F; microwaving stuffed, whole poultry is not recommended
- Egg dishes and casseroles cooked to 160 °F
- Reheat leftovers to 165 °F

Microwave containers and wraps

Only use safe microwaveable containers such as thick, non-decorative glass, wax paper, parchment paper, and undyed white paper towels. Plastic containers and one-use containers can warp and possibly pass harmful chemicals into food. Thin plastic storage bags, brown

paper or plastic grocery bags, newspapers, or aluminum foil should never be used in the microwave. A symbol on a container with squiggly lines such as the one below indicates that it is safe for microwave use.



Important information to know about your microwave

There are many different types of microwaves and not all work the same. Different wattages of microwaves affect the cooking time of foods. Some directions will list multiple cooking times for different types of wattages. For this reason, it is important to make sure you know what kind of microwave you own. As with all cooking methods, the only way to be sure food is at an acceptable temperature is to measure it with a thermometer.

If you are not sure of the wattage of your microwave, you can do one of the following:

- Read the instruction manual that came with your microwave
- Look to see if there is a sticker inside of the microwave door that lists the wattage
- Visit www.microwaveovenfacts.com for information about your microwave
- Contact the manufacturer

References:

www.FDA.gov
www.eatright.org
www.fsis.usda.gov
www.washingtonpost.com

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