

# How to Avoid Cross Contamination

Explore this Article ■ [Preventing Cross-Contamination When Shopping](#) ■ [Storing Food Correctly](#) ■ [Preparing Food Safely](#) ■ [References](#)

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Cross-contamination is when germs are transferred from one surface to another, and preventing it is especially important when working with food. Whether you're a restaurant chef or concerned about cross-contamination at home, general food safety guidelines are the same. From the grocery store to your countertop, the number one rule is to separate raw meats, such as raw chicken breast, and ready-to-eat foods, such as fresh produce or cooked meat. **Store** raw meat on your fridge's bottom shelf away from fruits and veggies. Use separate cutting boards and utensils to prepare raw and ready-to-eat foods, and wash your hands vigorously after handling raw meat.

## Method 1

### Method 1 of 3: Preventing Cross-Contamination When Shopping



**1 Keep ready-to-eat and raw foods separate in your shopping cart.** Drippings from raw meat, poultry, and seafood can contaminate other foods even before you head to the checkout line. Place raw foods in the bottom of your shopping cart as far away from ready-to-eat items as possible. Never store meat on top of produce or place a bag of veggies directly on top of a package of raw meat.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Ready-to-eat foods are items that don't need to be cooked or have already been cooked. Examples include fruits, vegetables, and deli meats. Foods that aren't ready-to-eat, such as raw chicken breast or raw ground beef, need to be cooked before you eat them.
- Cooking raw meats kills germs and makes them safe to eat. If drippings from raw chicken breast get on an apple, eating the apple will put you at risk of getting sick.



**2 Bag raw meat, poultry, and seafood separately at checkout.** If you bag groceries yourself, place raw and ready-to-eat foods in separate bags. When you don't bag your own groceries, make sure the employee bagging them keeps raw foods away from produce, cheese, and other ready-to-eat foods.<sup>[2]</sup>

- If possible, bag a package of raw meat, poultry, or seafood in plastic or paper before placing it into a reusable tote.<sup>[3]</sup>



**3 Get your groceries to the fridge within 2 hours.** Raw meats, dairy, and eggs need to be refrigerated within 2 hours. Schedule your errands so your groceries won't have to hang out in the car for an extended period of time.<sup>[4]</sup>

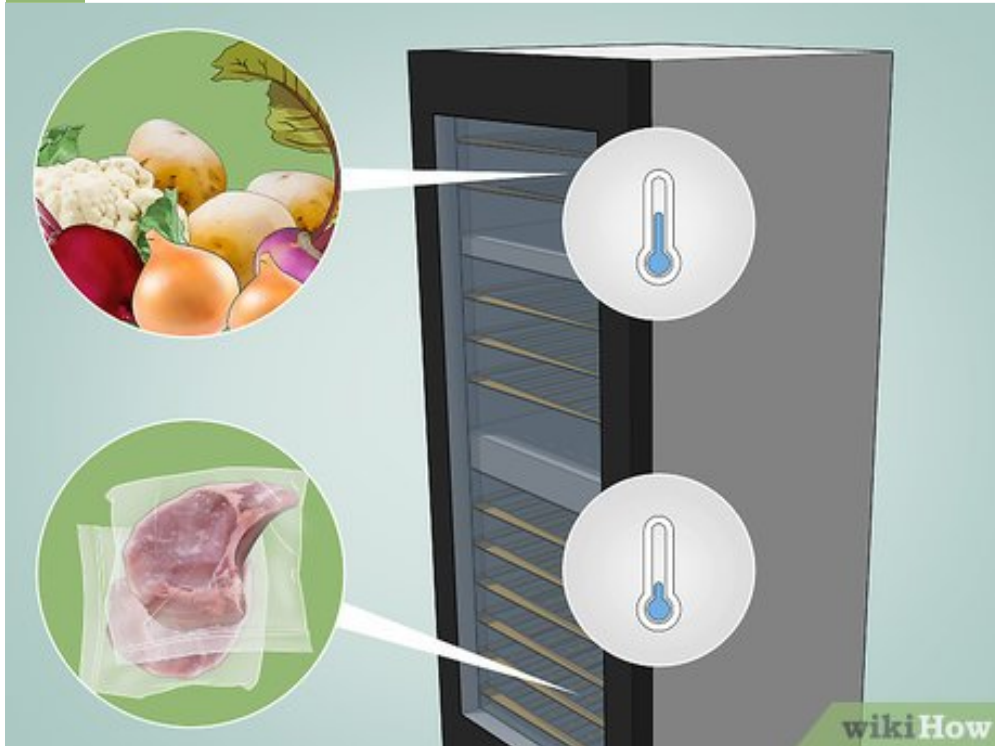
- If you can't get to a fridge within 2 hours, store your groceries in an insulated bag or cooler.



**4 Wash reusable totes with hot, soapy water.** Don't store your reusable totes in your vehicle's trunk or back seat. Wash them frequently by hand or in the washing machine on a hot cycle.<sup>[5]</sup>

- If you used a tote to carry boxed or canned items, you don't have to wash it after using it. However, you should wash a tote after using it to carry raw meat, poultry, or seafood. It's also wise to wash a tote after using it to carry produce.

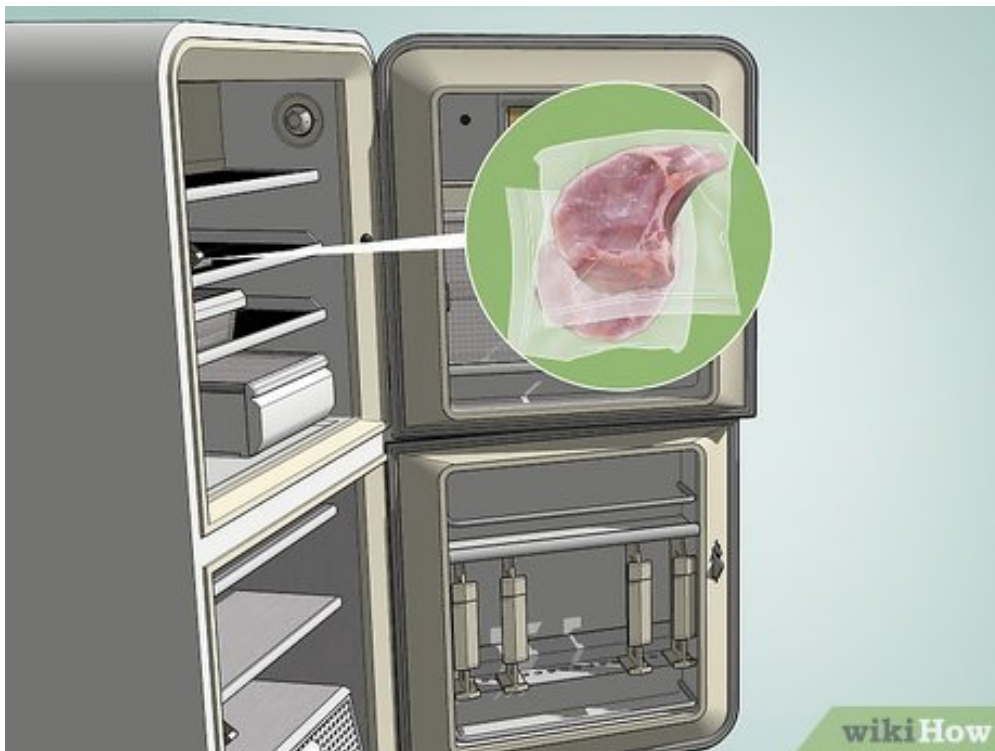
## Method 2 of 3: Storing Food Correctly



**1 Store raw meat, poultry, and seafood on your fridge's bottom shelf.** Keep ready-to-eat foods on your fridge's top shelves or in produce drawers. Avoid placing ready-to-eat and raw meats next to each other on the same shelf.<sup>[6]</sup>

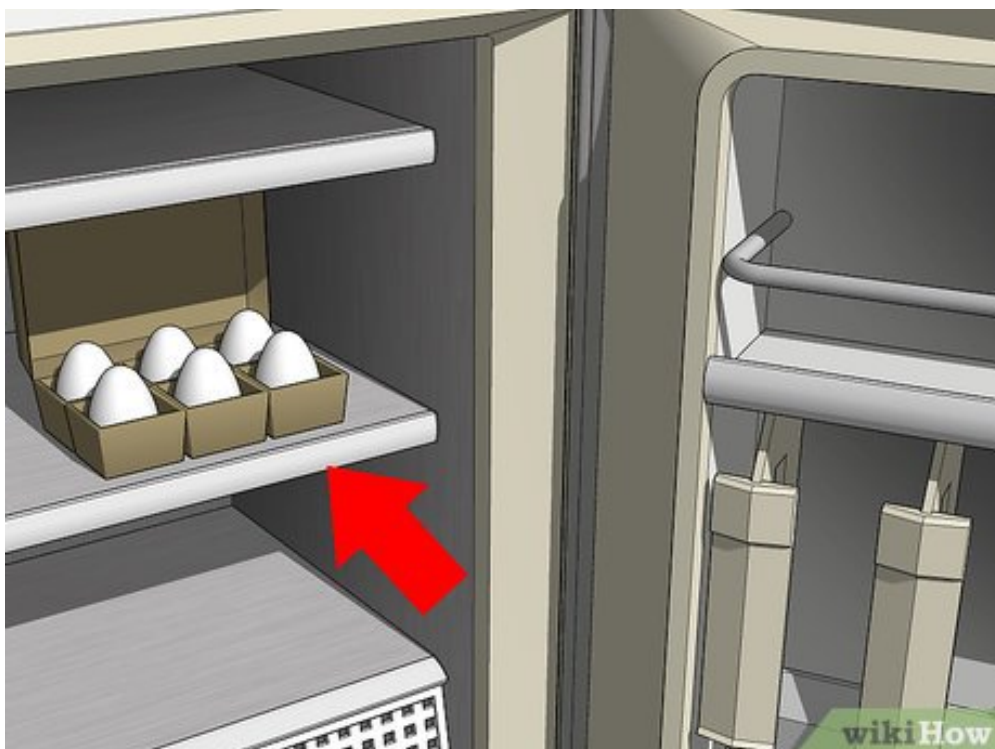
- If you're loading your fridge up with meat and need to store items on more than one shelf, try to follow proper storage flow. From top to bottom, proper storage flow for raw meats is seafood; whole cuts of beef and pork; ground beef, pork, or fish; and ground or whole poultry.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Clean shelves that held raw meat products before placing ready-to-eat foods on them.





**2 Freeze any meat you don't plan on using within a few days.** Try to cook raw meat, poultry, and seafood as soon as possible. Store raw ground meats, poultry, and seafood in the fridge for 1 to 2 days. Refrigerate uncooked beef, lamb, and pork for 3 to 5 days.<sup>[8]</sup>

- If you need to freeze raw items, wrap the package in foil or transfer pieces of meat to freezer bags. Foil or freezer bags will help prevent freezer burn and keep juices from dripping onto other items.<sup>[9]</sup>



**3 Store eggs and dairy on shelves instead of in your fridge's door.** Eggs and dairy are prone to bacterial growth, so keep them deep inside your fridge. Storing them in the door exposes them to wide temperature variations, which can lead to faster spoilage. Additionally, store eggs in their original container instead of a fridge's egg caddy.<sup>[10]</sup>



**4 Remove spoiled foods immediately.** Spoiled foods can stink up your fridge and spread germs to other items. If you think something is spoiled, don't taste test it. Just toss it in the garbage.<sup>[11]</sup>

- In general, you can refrigerate uncooked poultry and seafood for 1 to 2 days, uncooked red meats for 3 to 5 days, and cooked poultry, seafood, and meats for 3 to 4 days.<sup>[12]</sup>
- **Fruits and veggies storage** times vary widely. Leafy veggies can last in the fridge 1 to 2 weeks, while onions and other root vegetables can last several months. Toss produce if you see signs of spoilage, such as obvious mold growth, limp leaves, soft skin, or discoloration.<sup>[13]</sup>



**5** Clean your fridge **regularly**. Spot clean spills and drips as necessary. Every 1 to 3 months, take everything out of the fridge and deep clean it. Discard any expired items you've forgotten about, remove drawers, and scrub all nooks and crannies.<sup>[14]</sup>

- Scrub with a fresh nylon pad (not the sponge you use to wash your dishes). Use an all purpose kitchen cleaner, diluted bleach solution, or a diluted vinegar solution with a splash of lemon juice.
- Remember not to leave raw meats unrefrigerated for extended periods of time. Store your food in a cooler while you deep clean the fridge.

### Method 3 of 3: Preparing Food Safely



**1 Wash your hands frequently.** Always wash up with hot water and soap after handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Don't just dip your hands under water for 2 seconds. Wash them vigorously for a minimum of 20 seconds.<sup>[15]</sup>

- Cell phones and computer keyboards are among the germiest surfaces, so remember to wash up after checking a recipe or sending a text.<sup>[16]</sup>



**2 Rinse fruits and vegetables before cutting them.** Wash produce under cold running water, and don't use soap or detergent. Soak broccoli, cauliflower, and other items with lots of nooks and crannies in a bowl of cold water for 1 to 2 minutes.<sup>[17]</sup>

- If you're storing washed produce, place it into a new container instead of into its original package.<sup>[18]</sup>





**3 Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw and ready-to-eat foods.** Switch or wash the boards and knives you used to prepare raw meats before using them to prepare produce. Don't store raw meat on a platter, then use the same platter to serve cooked meat.<sup>[19]</sup>

- For instance, don't season raw chicken on a cutting board, then use the same cutting board to chop broccoli. Even if you plan on cooking the broccoli, it might not reach the internal temperature required to kill germs in raw chicken.
- Replace your cutting board if it has deep, hard to clean grooves.



**4 Place seasonings in small bowls when working with raw meat.** Pouring required amounts of salt, pepper, and other seasonings into small bowls might mean you'll have to do a few more dishes. However, you won't have to grab seasoning packages with unclean hands or run to the sink each time you rub the meat with an ingredient.<sup>[20]</sup>

- For instance, rub your chicken breast with salt, then reach for the bowls with pepper, garlic, and paprika. Wash your hands and the bowls when you're done seasoning.



**5 Marinate meat in the fridge and boil extra marinade before serving it.** Never marinate meat on the countertop or leave it unrefrigerated for extended periods. Excess marinade can make a great pan sauce, but marinade that's touched raw meat is a major health hazard. Boil it for at least 1 minute before serving it as a sauce.<sup>[21]</sup>

- You can also prepare extra marinade, divide it, and keep a portion of it away from raw meat.<sup>[22]</sup>



**6 Wash all counters and surfaces after preparing raw foods.** Wipe down surfaces with a kitchen cleaner or a diluted bleach or vinegar solution. Use paper towels or a cloth designated for countertops and other surfaces. Don't use the same sponge or cloth to clean both your dishes and countertops.<sup>[23]</sup>

- Don't forget about the sink, which harbors germs and residual food. Rinse away or pick up organic matter, then wipe it down with a cleaning solution.<sup>[24]</sup>

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