

Sanitation

(Keeping Things Clean)
by Karyn Tripp



Sanitation is a big word, but it is a very important one if you are learning to cook. Sanitation means you know how to keep things clean and safe so that nobody will get sick.

One of the most important things to do in the kitchen before beginning anything is to wash your hands. I am sure your mom tells you this all the time, but it really is important. Hands get really, really dirty throughout the day. If you knew all of the things that you touched in a day, you might just throw up. If you start using those dirty hands to make food for yourself or your family, everyone may be throwing up!

We carry a lot of germs on our hands, hair, and clothes. Don't let this stress you out, but do know that cleanliness is an important thing in the kitchen to help prevent illness. ALWAYS wash your hands before beginning work in the kitchen. Also, if you sneeze, cough, use the bathroom, or play outside, make sure to clean your hands again before working in the kitchen. If you have an open cut, make sure you cover it up with a bandage before cooking.



Washing Your Hands

Do you know the correct way to wash your hands? Begin with warm water. Warm water does a much better job at killing germs and bacteria that you have on your hands. Get a squirt of soap and lather it up on your hands. Make sure that you get all parts of your hands soapy and lathered (between your fingers and under your nails). Rub for 15-20 seconds with the soap.

I tell my kids to sing the ABC's while washing their hands to make sure they have done a good enough job. Rinse them off. Dry on a clean towel or paper towel. If you wipe your hands off on a dirty towel, it kind of defeats the whole purpose.

Keep Gross Stuff Out

There are a few other important ways to keep clean in the kitchen that we need to talk about. Do you like to lick foods when you are cooking? I have to admit, that I love tasting things as I am making them (especially sweets). If you are going to try things while cooking (and I do recommend this, so you know that everything tastes just right), make sure you clean your hands, or get a clean spoon each time. Nobody wants your saliva (spit) in their food. That is just gross! Another gross thing is getting hair in your food. Have you ever taken a bite of something and gotten a hair in your mouth? That is never fun. If you have long hair, please pull it back when cooking so other people don't have to get a big bite of your hair in their mouths.

Clean Surface Areas

Along with keeping yourself clean, you need to make sure the counters and the tools you are using are clean. Clean the counters and your workspace before and after cooking on them. Always use clean spoons for stirring and knives for cutting. You should never use the same knife or cutting board when working with meats and fresh fruits and vegetables. This is called cross contamination. Do you know what contamination means? It is the spreading of germs around the kitchen. We don't want that in our kitchens, do we?

Keep Food Clean

There are some rules about keeping food clean, too. Fruits and vegetables need to be washed before you use them. You need to make sure the food you use is fresh and not spoiled or out of date or moldy. You can usually tell most things by smelling them, but not always. With fruits and vegetables they can get squishy or have bad spots on them. Meats and dairy usually have a date that they should be used by to help you know if it is still fresh. Make sure to refrigerate meats, dairy, eggs, and anything else that says to on the food label. It is really important to not eat foods that have gone bad because this can make you sick as well. Don't eat leftovers that are more than a few days old. When in doubt, throw it out!

Cook Food Properly

Another gross thing that can make you sick is eating any raw or undercooked meats. I told you about cross contamination a minute ago. Let me explain a little more about that. Raw meats can have really harmful bacteria in them that can make you VERY sick. They go away when you cook them properly, but if you get raw meat juice all over the kitchen and your hands while cooking, it can still get those germs into your foods. You need to be extra careful about cleaning up when working with meats. Wash your hands well after cutting raw meat. Clean the cutting board, plate or knife and don't use them for anything else before they are thoroughly cleaned.

Food Borne Illnesses

Food borne illnesses are sicknesses that come just from bad foods or not keeping yourself or your food clean. If you don't follow these sanitation rules, germs and sickness can be spread through foods that you eat. There are a few types of food borne illnesses, but if you follow these important rules of keeping clean, you don't need to worry!

Let's stay safe and healthy by keeping the kitchen clean. Have fun learning to cook!