

# Food Hygiene Without Fear

## Clear routines without anxiety or shame

Food hygiene is meant to reduce genuine risk. It is not meant to make every surface, date or decision feel dangerous. Clear routines can protect health while leaving room for ordinary life, sensory needs, fluctuating capacity and uncertainty.

*Aim for evidence-based enough—not endless checking, repeated cleaning or perfect certainty.*

## The four practical areas

| Area                                | Core purpose                                                 | A clear routine                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cleaning</b>                     | Reduce transfer from hands, equipment and surfaces.          | Wash hands at the relevant times; clean food-contact equipment and spills; use products as directed.            |
| <b>Cooking</b>                      | Cook food safely throughout.                                 | Follow the specific recipe, packet and appliance instructions; use an appropriate thermometer where advised.    |
| <b>Chilling</b>                     | Keep chilled food cold and limit time at room temperature.   | Keep the fridge within current FSA guidance; refrigerate suitable leftovers promptly and follow storage limits. |
| <b>Avoiding cross-contamination</b> | Prevent harmful organisms or allergens moving between foods. | Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods apart; use clean equipment and follow allergy-specific precautions.             |

## Wash hands at the useful moments

| Wash before                                                        | Wash after                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preparing or eating food.                                          | Handling raw meat, poultry, fish or eggs where guidance requires.                 |
| Handling ready-to-eat food after another task.                     | Using the toilet, touching bins, cleaning, handling pets or dealing with illness. |
| Starting again after an interruption that could contaminate hands. | Coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose before returning to food.                 |

## One effective wash is enough

Use soap and water and follow current NHS/FSA handwashing guidance. Rewashing immediately because it does not “feel certain” usually adds distress rather than protection. If you lose track, use one defined routine, dry hands and move to the next step.

## Use-by and best-before are different

| Label                         | What it relates to                                 | Action                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Use-by</b>                 | Safety on foods that can become unsafe.            | Follow the date and storage instructions. Do not rely on smell or appearance after the use-by date.         |
| <b>Best-before</b>            | Quality rather than safety for many foods.         | Follow storage guidance; use appropriate sensory checks only where official guidance says this is suitable. |
| <b>Opened on / use within</b> | The safe or quality period may change once opened. | Keep the original instructions and label the opening date if that helps.                                    |

## Allergen safety needs exact information

For food allergy, check the complete current label every time, including familiar products. Prevent cross-contact using the precautions appropriate to the allergy and household. “May contain” and precautionary labelling require individual clinical guidance when uncertain. An anxiety-reducing routine must never remove necessary allergen precautions.

## Maggie’s reflection

Food-safety anxiety can make the kitchen feel as if one missed action will cause harm. A short written routine can help: do the relevant step once, record what matters and move on. Support should reduce risk and fear—not demand impossible certainty.

# A calm routine from shopping to leftovers

## Use the instruction that belongs to the food

General rules are helpful, but the safest details come from the exact product, appliance and current official guidance. Keep packets or photograph instructions when memory and working memory are under pressure.

## Shopping and arriving home

| Step         | Practical action                                                     | Low-demand support                                                  |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Choose       | Check packaging, use-by dates, allergens and storage requirements.   | Buy familiar products; photograph exact safe brands.                |
| Transport    | Keep chilled and frozen foods appropriately cold and minimise delay. | Group cold items; use suitable cool bags when needed.               |
| Put away     | Store chilled/frozen food first and follow label instructions.       | Shelf-stable items can wait briefly if appropriate.                 |
| Fridge check | Use a fridge thermometer and current FSA temperature guidance.       | One visible thermometer is clearer than repeated touching/checking. |

## Preparing food

| Before                                                                 | During                                                                                | After                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clear one food-contact space. Wash hands once. Gather clean equipment. | Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods separate. Follow the recipe and packet.               | Clean relevant equipment and surfaces. Store or discard food according to guidance. |
| Check allergen and storage instructions.                               | Use separate utensils/areas where allergy or cross-contamination precautions require. | Do not repeatedly reclean areas that have already completed the routine.            |

## Cooking without guessing

Follow the stated time, temperature and appliance instructions for the specific food. Check the centre or thickest part where guidance requires. A suitable food thermometer can provide an objective check, but it must be used and cleaned correctly. Colour, smell or tasting alone may not show that food is safely cooked.

## Cooling, leftovers and reheating

| Stage     | Routine                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decide    | Only keep leftovers you expect to use and can store safely.                                                                               |
| Cool      | Cool suitable cooked food and refrigerate it within the timescale in current FSA guidance; divide into smaller portions when appropriate. |
| Label     | Name the food and record the date or use point. Keep essential allergen information.                                                      |
| Store     | Use clean covered containers and keep within current official or manufacturer limits.                                                     |
| Reheat    | Follow the food/manufacturer guidance; reheat thoroughly where required and observe limits on reheating.                                  |
| Uncertain | Do not taste to test safety. Check a trusted source or discard when safe identification is not possible.                                  |

## When anxiety asks for another check

| Anxiety says                           | Evidence-based response                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Wash it again, just in case."         | Did I complete the written routine once? If yes, move on.                                      |
| "The date might be wrong."             | Read the label once, identify use-by or best-before, and follow the matching rule.             |
| "I cannot be completely certain."      | Food safety uses reasonable, observable steps—not a feeling of total certainty.                |
| "Everything nearby is contaminated."   | Identify the actual contact route and clean only the relevant area/equipment.                  |
| "I need someone to reassure me again." | Use the agreed checklist or one trusted source; repeated reassurance can strengthen the cycle. |

## When professional support may help

Seek help if fear leads to repeated washing, checking, throwing away safe food, avoiding the kitchen, restricting intake, asking for continual reassurance or being unable to trust completed routines. A GP, appropriately trained therapist, occupational therapist or dietitian can help while necessary allergy and food-safety precautions remain in place.

# My calm food-hygiene plan

A printable routine to complete once

## Before food preparation

| Task         | My clear action                                                   | Done |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Hands        | Wash once using the agreed method.                                | ■    |
| Work area    | Clear and clean the relevant food-contact space.                  | ■    |
| Equipment    | Gather the clean items needed for this recipe.                    | ■    |
| Instructions | Read the packet/recipe and identify cooking and storage guidance. | ■    |
| Allergens    | Complete the necessary label and cross-contact check.             | ■    |

## My fridge and storage record

| Check                                 | My information |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Fridge thermometer location           | _____          |
| My current official safe range source | _____          |
| Where raw food is stored              | _____          |
| Where ready-to-eat food is stored     | _____          |
| My leftovers label system             | _____          |

## Use the matching rule

| Situation                    | Rule I will follow |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Use-by date                  | _____              |
| Best-before date             | _____              |
| Opened product               | _____              |
| Cooked leftovers             | _____              |
| Frozen / defrosted food      | _____              |
| Unlabelled or uncertain food | _____              |

## One-check agreement

|                                  |                                                             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| My trusted source                | Food Standards Agency / manufacturer / clinician: _____     |
| My completed routine means       | I have taken the reasonable safety step and can move on.    |
| If anxiety continues             | I will pause, regulate and avoid adding unplanned checks.   |
| If there is new evidence of risk | I will respond to the evidence and seek appropriate advice. |

## Current UK sources

**Food Standards Agency:** [food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene](https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene) — home food safety, cooking, chilling, cross-contamination, date labels and allergens. **NHS:** [nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels) — food information and labels; [nhs.uk/live-well/best-way-to-wash-your-hands](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/best-way-to-wash-your-hands) — handwashing. Guidance can change; check the current official page and the exact product/appliance instructions.

## Clinical note

This guide is educational and does not replace individual medical, dietetic, allergy, immunology, swallowing, eating-disorder, OCD or food-safety advice. People who are pregnant, immunocompromised, very young, older or living with particular medical conditions may need additional guidance. Seek qualified help when intake or hydration is limited, health is changing, or fear and restriction are increasingly affecting daily life.

## A message from Maggie

Food hygiene can be clear without becoming frightening. Use the relevant routine, complete it once and let “safely enough” be enough. If fear keeps moving the finishing line, you deserve support that protects both physical health and your relationship with food.