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# *Family*

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**National Chicken Month**

## **CHICKEN NUGGETS WISDOM**

4 facts you should know about  
our favorite white meat



# CHICKEN NUGGETS WISDOM

## 4 facts you should know about our favorite white meat

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

Why did the chicken cross the road? Contrary to conventional wisdom, the answer is: To become dinner for a majority of Americans. Chicken is the top protein source for United States consumers, who gobbled up more than 92 pounds of chicken per person in 2017, eclipsing pork at 50 pounds per person and beef at nearly 57 pounds per person. More than half—55 percent—of chicken sold in the U.S. was purchased at grocery stores for home preparation and consumption. But as with any raw food product—poultry, meat, vegetables, or fruit—it is important to observe safe food-handling procedures when purchasing, storing, preparing, cooking, and dealing with leftovers.

According to the National Chicken Council ([eatchicken.com](http://eatchicken.com)), “Four simple words—clean, separate, cook, and chill—can serve as reminders to always handle and cook food safely to reduce the risk of illness to you and your family.” Here are some of the major points to keep in mind when it comes to everyone’s favorite fowl:

### Keep It Clean

Wash your hands, kitchen counters, cutting boards, and utensils thoroughly with soap and hot water immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry, including frozen and fresh products. Hands should be washed before handling food and between handling different food items. It is a good idea to keep separate cutting boards for meat, poultry, and produce, or to wash and disinfect cutting boards in between preparing different foods.

### Separate for Safety

Avoid cross-contamination between raw poultry and other foods. Keep raw meat, raw poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods in your grocery cart, and place these foods in separate plastic bags to prevent juices from leaking onto other food items. Store raw poultry in a bowl or on a covered platter

at the bottom of your refrigerator, and keep it from touching other foods. Raw chicken can be kept in the refrigerator for one to two days, or frozen for up to one year.

Thaw frozen poultry in the refrigerator, in the microwave, or in a leak-proof plastic bag submerged in cold water, never on the countertop or stove. Do not rinse poultry in the sink, as this can spread raw chicken juices and bacteria around the sink, and onto countertops and utensils, and potentially contaminate other foods.

### Cook Completely

The only way to destroy bacteria in raw meat and poultry is to cook it thoroughly. The minimum internal temperature for cooking all types of raw poultry, including ground poultry, is 165 °F, measured with a food thermometer. Never rely on the color of the juices, texture of the skin, or looseness of the joints to determine when the meat is done. After cooking, refrigerate any uneaten portions within two hours; leftovers will remain safe to eat for two to three days. Frozen cooked chicken will be safe to eat for four to six months. If you intend to grill chicken on the barbecue, keep it refrigerated until you are ready to cook; do not transport raw and cooked poultry on the same plate. Marinate chicken in the refrigerator, not on the countertop, for up to two days; discard any unused marinade.

### Chill Out

Organize your shopping trips so that chicken is the last item you select before going to the checkout line. Once home, refrigerate or freeze the chicken promptly. Your refrigerator should be set to maintain a temperature of 40 °F or below; freezers should be set to 0° F. If you are not going to be home in less than one hour, place raw poultry in a cooler with ice.

For more information or questions about food safety, contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).