

Kitchen Cleanliness



A lot of people call me a clean freak. My house is pretty spotless most of the time. I have two cats, but I don't have any small, human children, so frankly, this is not that hard to do. My husband and I split up the household duties pretty evenly. I do the menu, shop for the food, and cook it. Sometimes he chops veggies. He's a great sous chef. He also loads my dirty cooking tools in the dishwasher. I do the cat litter. He refuses that job completely. But in exchange, he does the laundry. Now that we downsized, the laundry is just a few steps outside the kitchen, so he runs small loads almost every day. He also vacuums and mops the kitchen floor. What a guy.

There are few other things I do that revolve around my cooking and my kitchen that I thought I'd pass along:

When I cook meat, I pay close attention to make sure my kitchen remains sanitized. If the meat I buy comes from the grocer wrapped in plastic, I put a few paper towels on my cutting board. Then I slit open the package across the top and remove the meat. This way I don't have to tilt it and spill the drippings all over the counter. The paper towels and the cutting board may have a few drips on them, but they won't have much. Then I carefully remove the cutting board and sanitize it. I get

another one out to cut my veggies. I have several cutting boards of various sizes for this purpose. The packaging goes quickly into the trash.

Let's say the meat I brought home from the grocery store is wrapped in butcher paper. I get out a cutting board and put it on the counter. I open my butcher paper on top of the cutting board. Then I unwrap the meat and either transfer it directly from the butcher paper to the cooking pan or I prep it on top of the paper. Maybe I have to cut salmon, or maybe I'm trimming fat off a pork tenderloin. Whatever it is, it goes from the butcher paper to the prepped pan it will be cooked in, even chicken. I might pat it dry if I need to sprinkle a rub on it, but I don't wash it in the sink. I stopped doing that years ago (I'll tell you why in a minute). Whatever raw meat I am taking from the butcher paper to the cooking pan never hits the cutting board, the counter, or even the sink. I then wrap up the butcher paper and take all of the drippings that have collected there and put it all directly in the trash.

Some people gag at the thought of not washing chicken. There's usually a drippy mess in the bottom of the package. That's true. I see it just like everyone else. Clean freak that I am, I am confident I am doing the best thing. With several salmonella scares of late, this topic has been on the news recently. I was listening to the radio one evening and they were talking about a study that analyzed the rinsing of chicken over the sink. They used infra-red technology and were shocked by what they found. They determined that when you rinse your chicken in the sink, you send microscopic splatters of water, along with contaminated chicken juice, all over your sink area and your countertop. That's the biggest reason people get food poisoning from chicken. They give it to themselves by not prepping correctly. The splatter goes all over the place. It gets on your kitchen dish rag if it's anywhere near the sink. It gets on the fixtures

and then you touch them. Even if you wash your hands after washing the chicken, unless you sanitize the whole area, you're doomed to pick up the germs and transport them to other parts of your kitchen or even to yourself. Lick your finger and BINGO. If you are one of those people who keep a squirt bottle of hand sanitizer near your sink, you just contaminated that too. How ironic.

When you cook chicken to 165 degrees or higher, all of the microbial bad guys (including salmonella) are DEAD. You don't need to worry about them anymore. So if you cook your chicken until it's no longer pink in the middle then you've removed the risk of salmonella transference when you eat.

Speaking of things around the sink...

When people come over and want to help in the kitchen I am VERY grateful. Some guys pull up to the sink and even volunteer to wash pots and pans. They ask for a dishrag. I hand them a sponge. They look at me a bit funny at first but they get used to it and get quite handy at using a sponge. I transferred from using a dishrag to a sponge years ago. Here's why:

We've all heard that our sink is probably the dirtiest place in our house; at least that's where the highest variety of germs hang out if we are not careful.

When I was a kid, we were a 'dishrag household.' We had seven kids. That dishrag got a serious workout daily. I'm making an ugly face as I type this just from the memory. I used to make the mistake of sniffing that rag sometimes. It was gross! I think there were times when that rag was around the sink for days. You know what people do. They use it, rinse it, and then hang it over the arm of the kitchen sink spout. It dries there and they use it again.

Not me. I use a sponge. After you clean up, it's so easy to put that sponge in the dishwasher on the top rack and when the dishes are done, voila, I take out a sanitized sponge along with it. I rotate two of them so there is always a back-up in the sink. Even if it doesn't get washed every single day, it's a far cry from that grody rag. If you don't have a dishwasher but you have a microwave oven, I hear that does a great job of killing the bacteria too.

So there you have it; two kitchen cleanliness hints that I use on a daily basis. Feel free to comment on this article and offer up your own ideas.

Cheers!