

When it's OK to cut corners—and when you might sacrifice safety and taste

# How Bad Is It ...?

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## ■ TO BOIL INSTEAD OF SIMMER?

**Really Bad.** A simmer consists of small yet constant pockets of bubbling and a few wisps of steam (roughly 180°F). A boil produces constant steam, with large bubbles quickly rising to the surface (212°F). Boiling destroys the protein in meat, drying it out. However, a boil followed by a cold rinse is best for colorful vegetables like green beans, which can fade when simmered. The takeaway? Closely follow the method the recipe calls for.

## ■ TO COOK BEFORE THE OVEN IS PREHEATED?

**Somewhat Bad.** This shortcut could raise your risk of food-borne illness, especially if food has been out at room temperature for a while. When food is in the danger zone of 40°F to



140°F, bacteria multiply quickly. To be safe, it's better to wait until the oven reaches cooking temperature.

#### ■ TO JUST CUT AWAY THE MOLD?

**It Depends.** Firm foods are more likely to be safe than soft foods. Mold generally can't penetrate deep into hard cheeses like Asiago and cheddar, so it's OK to cut off about an inch. The same goes for firm produce like bell peppers and carrots. However, chuck moldy-looking foods with high moisture content—yogurt, soft cheeses, cooked leftovers, and bread. Porous foods are likely to be contaminated beneath the surface.

#### ■ TO BAKE WITH COLD EGGS?

**Somewhat Bad.** Many recipes suggest bringing eggs to room temperature before baking, since ingredients mix best at the same temperature. This creates a smooth batter that rises well for fluffy desserts like angel food cake. For cookies, which are chewier if baked with chilled batter, mix ingredients at room temperature, then chill for 30 minutes.

#### ■ TO SKIP THE PASTA RINSE?

**Not Bad at All.** It's actually your best option. Rinsing noodles washes away flavor and natural starch, which helps yummy sauce stick. It's why some recipes suggest saving pasta water to use in sauce. Instead, skip the wash and spread drained pasta on a pan to cool.

#### ■ TO REFREEZE DEFROSTED FOOD? **Somewhat Bad.**

If you defrost food in the refrigerator (which should be 40°F or below), it is safe to return to the freezer, but it will taste worse. Defrosting melts frozen water molecules, causing dryness and changes in texture and flavor. Defrosting the food a second time increases these effects.

#### ■ TO NOT LET MEAT REST?

**Really Bad.** If you don't let meat sit after it's done cooking, delicious juices will pool out of the meat, leaving your dinner dry and bland. These juices migrate toward the center of the meat cut during cooking. Allowing just five to ten minutes for a small cut like a boneless, skinless chicken breast or steak allows juices to redistribute throughout.

#### ■ TO USE A BLENDER AND A FOOD PROCESSOR INTERCHANGEABLY?

**Somewhat Bad.** For liquid foods like salad dressings and soups, a blender mixes ingredients efficiently. But these recipes can be messy in a food processor, which can leak if any liquid covers the blade piece. For solids like veggies and nuts, however, opt for the food processor. A typical blender's tiny blade creates air pockets that make it difficult for solids to mix. **R**

Sources: Sabrina Sexton, program director of culinary arts at the Institute of Culinary Education; Candy Argondizza, vice president of culinary and pastry arts at the International Culinary Center; [fsis.usda.gov](http://fsis.usda.gov); [fda.gov](http://fda.gov); [thekitchn.com](http://thekitchn.com); [finecooking.com](http://finecooking.com); [eatingwell.com](http://eatingwell.com); [cookinglight.com](http://cookinglight.com); [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)