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-*Title of article:* "Learn Egg Basics"

What's the most important thing to remember about food safety? Most foods are entirely safe if they're properly handled, stored and cooked. The Fight BAC!™ Education campaign has made it easy to remember the important safety points — clean, chill, cook and separate.

For eggs, the risks are low — only 1 in 20,000 eggs is likely to contain Salmonella and these bacteria are destroyed by proper cooking. In general, it's best to cook eggs slowly over gentle heat for a high-quality finished dish and to help ensure even heat penetration. For proper doneness, cook egg dishes according to the following guidelines and then serve them promptly.

Egg Doneness Guidelines

- **Scrambled eggs, omelets and frittatas.** Cook until the eggs are thickened and no visible liquid egg remains.
- **Fried eggs.** To cook both sides and increase the temperature the eggs reach, cook slowly and either baste the eggs with fat from the pan, cover the pan with a lid or turn the eggs. Cook until the whites are completely set and the yolks begin to thicken but are not hard.
- **Poached eggs.** Cook in gently simmering water until the whites are completely set and the yolks begin to thicken but are not hard, about 3 to 5 minutes. If you steam the eggs — cook about 6 to 7 minutes. Avoid precooking and reheating poached or steamed eggs.
- **Baked goods, hard-cooked eggs.** These will easily reach internal temperatures of more than 160 degrees F when they are done. Note, though, that while Salmonella is destroyed when hard-cooked eggs are properly prepared, hard-cooked eggs can spoil more quickly than raw eggs. After cooking, cool hard-cooked eggs quickly under running cold water or in ice water. Avoid allowing eggs to stand in stagnant water. Refrigerate hard-cooked eggs in their shells promptly after cooling and use them within 1 week.
- **French toast, Monte Cristo sandwiches, crab or other fish cakes, quiches, stratas, baked custards, most casseroles.** Cook or bake until a thermometer inserted at the center shows 160 degrees F. or a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. You may find it difficult to tell if a knife shows uncooked egg or melted cheese in some casseroles and other combination dishes that are thick or heavy and contain cheese — lasagne, for example. To be sure these dishes are done, check to see that a thermometer at the center of the dish shows 160 degrees F. Also use a thermometer to help guard against uneven cooking due to hot spots and inadequate cooking due to varying oven temperatures.
- **Soft (stirred) custards, including cream pie, eggnog and ice cream bases.** Cook until thick enough to coat a metal spoon with a thin film and a thermometer shows 160 degrees F or higher. After cooking, cool quickly by setting the pan in ice or cold water and stirring for a few minutes. Cover and refrigerate to chill thoroughly, at least 1 hour.

- **Soft (pie) meringue.** Bake a 3-egg white meringue spread on a *hot*, fully cooked pie filling in a preheated 350 degree F oven until the meringue reaches 160 degrees F, about 15 minutes. For meringues using more whites, bake at 325 degrees F (or a lower temperature) until a thermometer registers 160 degrees F, about 25 to 30 minutes (or more). The more egg whites, the lower the temperature and longer the time you need to cook the meringue through without excessive browning. Refrigerate meringue-topped pies until serving. Return leftovers to the refrigerator.

If you microwave your eggs, remember that all models of microwave ovens tend to cook foods unevenly, leaving cold spots. To encourage more even cooking, cover the dish, stir the ingredients, if possible, and rotate the dish at least once or twice during the cooking time.

For more egg safety facts, visit www.aeb.org; for safety information on meat, poultry and eggs, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 and, for safety facts on all foods, visit www.fightback.org

Shelia Lewis is a Smith County Extension agent in family and consumer sciences. She can be reached at 903/535-0885 or via e-mail at sk-lewis@tamu.edu. This column on family and consumer education news appears in the Sunday Community section of the *Tyler Courier-Times-Telegraph*.

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