

## Kitchen Safety

# SLOW COOKERS



### IS A SLOW COOKER SAFE?

When used correctly, cooking in a slow cooker is a safe process. Direct heat from the cooker and steam formed during cooking, in a tightly covered container, allow food to cook slowly. This destroys bacteria and makes the food safe to eat.

### BEGIN WITH CLEANLINESS

- Be sure the cooker, utensils, work space and your hands are clean.
- Wash vegetables thoroughly in clean water to remove as much soil and bacteria as possible. There is no need to wash meat because this can spread bacteria.

### KEEP FOODS COLD

- Refrigerate meat and other perishable ingredients until they are ready for the cooker.
- Thaw meat and poultry before adding to the cooker. Otherwise, it can take too long to heat to a safe temperature.

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Always thaw meat and poultry before putting it into the slow cooker.

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### MAKE SURE YOUR FOODS FIT

- Check your cooker manual for suggested sizes of meat and poultry to cook in your slow cooker.
- Check your cooker manual before cooking large cuts of meat. Large chunks may take too long to cook all the way through.

### ADD INGREDIENTS IN ORDER

- Place vegetables on the bottom or sides because they take longer to cook.
- Add the meat and liquid. Dishes with liquid such as chili, soup and stew are good choices for slow cooking because the liquid creates steam.

## PAY ATTENTION TO TEMPERATURE

- Use the high setting for the first hour to heat food quickly. Then, turn the cooker down to the setting called for in the recipe. If this is not possible, it is safe to heat on low the entire time. **However, never program the slow cooker to delay cooking until later in the day.** Bacteria grow rapidly when the temperature of the food is between 40 and 140 F when the cooker is not on.
- Cook food on high or low settings. Warm settings are not designed for cooking.
- Use a food thermometer to be sure food reaches a safe temperature. Cook roasts to 145 to 160 F, poultry to 165 F and soups, stews and sauces to 165 F.
- Keep the lid on the cooker unless it is necessary to check for doneness.

## What do you do if the power goes out?

**If you are at home...**finish cooking the ingredients immediately by other means such as a gas stove, outdoor grill or at a house where power is on.

**If you are not at home during the entire cooking process...**throw away the food even if it looks done.

**If you are at home and the food was completely cooked before the power went out...**the food should be safe up to two hours in the cooker with the power off.

## HANDLE LEFTOVERS SAFELY

- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours
- Use shallow containers to cool leftovers quickly.
- Reheat leftovers on the stove, microwave or conventional oven (not the slow cooker) until the temperature of the food reaches 165 F or higher. Transfer to a slow cooker to keep warm (140 F or higher).



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