

Kitchen Korner

How Your Kitchen Works

(NAPSA)—Young adults starting out on their own are discovering a world that's often new to them—the kitchen. For many young people, living on their own means preparing their own meals and finding their way around the kitchen for the first time.

New research shows that while most 18- to 34-year-olds have some concept of proper kitchen protocol, there are distinct gaps in their knowledge. A national survey sponsored by the American Plastics Council reveals that many young adults are unsure of how to store and heat food properly and may be unknowingly taking risks that could lead to food-borne illnesses.

For example, 28 percent of those surveyed leave food out on the counter to defrost at room temperature, which increases the risk of bacterial growth, and 16 percent store food in the refrigerator uncovered. When it comes to reheating food, 18 percent microwave food in plastic containers meant for cold storage only.

Being smart in the kitchen really boils down to having the right tools and knowing how to use them properly. Here are some basic tips to help make your life easier and safer in the kitchen:

- **Store leftovers in airtight containers or sealable bags.** Food should be packaged and stored within two hours after cooking. Divide leftovers into convenient, single-serving-size plastic containers. This will allow food to cool faster, helping to prevent bacteria from getting a foothold. To save time, use plastic containers designed for use in the freezer, microwave and dishwasher.

- **Adopt the “first in, first out” system.** Use a permanent



Help keep foods fresher longer by sealing plastic lids on tight and squeezing the air out of sealable plastic bags.

marker and labels to write the date on leftover containers. Routinely check those labels and move older leftovers to the front of the refrigerator so they are used before they spoil.

- **Don't defrost at room temperature.** To help prevent bacteria from invading your meal, allow food to defrost safely in the refrigerator overnight, tightly covered in a plastic bag or wrap. For quicker thawing, follow microwave defrosting guidelines.

- **Microwave the right way.** Many plastics are specifically designed with high heat resistance for use in the microwave oven, while others are not. Always check the product or packaging label to determine whether something is appropriate for microwave use.

- **Keep food covered.** Using plastic wrap to cover food in the microwave can help with even heating and prevent messy splatters. Cover loosely, allowing about an inch of space between the wrap and the food, and vent one corner to allow steam to escape.

For more tips and information, please visit www.plasticsinfo.org.