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Flowers or chocolate? Dining out or staying in? These are the two biggest Valentine's Day dilemmas! While flowers and chocolates can help make for a great night, poor dining choices can end the celebration early. [Stop Foodborne Illness](#) wants you to be aware of how preventing foodborne illness this Valentine's Day is one of the most romantic gestures you can make. Whether you're headed to a restaurant or preparing a decadent feast at home, make sure your meal is pathogen free.

"Valentine's Day is a day to celebrate. We appreciate that it's also a time that many of us dine out or prepare special meals for an intimate evening. We're here to remind you how to keep your dining safe," says Deirdre Schlunegger, CEO of Stop Foodborne Illness.

For those treating their sweetheart to a romantic night out, follow these food safety steps to keep your date safe:

- **Assess the scene.** CDC recommends looking for certificates that show food-safety practices—like recent health inspection score and manager's completion of food-safety trainings. Note whether the glasses, silverware, napkins and tablecloths are clean. [Food Safety News](#) says it is not hard to get an A in the restaurant business; if there isn't an A on the door, walk away.

- **Say no to raw oysters.** [Raw oysters are a popular](#) Valentine's day treat however, they can be contaminated with a variety of foodborne pathogens such as *E. coli*, norovirus and *Vibrio vulnificus*. If you're looking for an aphrodisiac fix, order Oysters Rockefeller instead!
- **Get that doggie bag in the fridge—fast.** [Leftovers need to be refrigerated](#) quickly (within two hours of being served or one hour if temperatures are above 90°F) to avoid the spread of dangerous bacteria. If you're not going straight home, leave the leftovers at the restaurant.

Cooking your other half's favorite meal? Make sure you're practicing food safety before, during and after for a sweet and safe dinner.

- **Wash the produce.** Making a fancy multi-course meal? Don't cut corners and serve unwashed produce, even prewashed produce. Stop Foodborne Illness recommends thoroughly [washing all fresh veggies](#) and fruits to minimize potential bacterial contamination.
- **Be cautious of food temperatures.** Food left in the danger zone—above 40 degrees and below 140 degrees—facilitates bacterial growth. To avoid the spread of foodborne illness, keep [hot foods hot](#) (internal temperature of 140°F or above) and cold foods cold (40°F or below).
- **Cook food thoroughly.** A food thermometer is a critical tool to ensure your romantic meal is safe for your sweetheart. If poultry is on the menu (including ground poultry), the thickest part must reach an internal temperature of 165°F or higher. Whole cuts of meat and seafood should have an internal temperature of 145°F. For ground meats other than poultry, a safe internal temperature is 160°F. Learn more about [safe cooking temperatures](#).
- **Bake safely.** Molten chocolate lava cakes, red velvet cheesecake, truffles and chocolate mousse are some of the most iconic Valentine's Day treats but amateur and seasoned bakers should be extra careful preparing these sweets since they call for chocolate, cream and eggs. Stop Foodborne Illness recommends avoiding no-bake recipes and always baking desserts to an internal temperature of at least 160°F to kill harmful bacteria.
- **Refrigerate leftovers.** Before cuddling up on the couch, get those leftovers in the refrigerator! Letting food sit out longer than two hours is one of the most common food safety mistakes. Stop Foodborne Illness recommends [storing leftovers in 2-inch deep, shallow containers](#) within two hours of serving.

About Stop Foodborne Illness

Stop Foodborne Illness is a national nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens by promoting sound food safety policy and best practices, building public awareness, and assisting those impacted by foodborne illness.

For more food safety tips please visit www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/. If you [think you have been sickened from food](#), contact your local health professional.

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