The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the FDA collect data on which bacteria or viruses were most common, and what mistakes were made that allowed them to grow or survive in our food.
The most recent summaries say that the top 5 mistakes that caused illnesses were these:

1. **The food was allowed to sit at room temperature.** Either it was not kept hot enough or cold enough to stop bacteria from growing. Some of the most common calls I get are about food that was forgotten in the car, either from the grocery or from the restaurant. Or food that was left to thaw on the counter overnight. They were not worth food poisoning! Throw it out if you forgot it!

2. **The next most common cause of illness was using an unsafe food source.** This could be someone picking wild mushrooms, or buying fish that had eaten toxic algae. Always buy food from good sources, not on the side of the road.

3. **The third cause was inadequate cooking.** Food was not cooked enough to be sure any bacteria in it were killed. Use a thermometer! Always check the temperature to be sure it's safe, from eggs to steaks, grills to microwaves. I often get calls about reheating foods. Use a thermometer to be sure!

4. **Poor personal hygiene was the 4th cause of illness.** Please, wash your hands! Often! Don't smoke or fix your hair while you're cooking.

5. **The 5th cause was contaminated equipment.** That could be dirty utensils or cutting boards that were not washed and sanitized between foods. Use different cutting boards, can openers and other equipment for different foods. Don't spread the germs around!

There are just 4 rules to remember for food safety: **Keep food hot, cold, clean and separate.** Do that, you'll be safe!

Check out our FAQs on Food Safety videos. Look at the list of topics, choose what's on your mind, and get the facts in 2 minutes or less. They're on our website, easy to access day or night, whenever you have a food safety question!

[http://hillsborough.ifas.ufl.edu](http://hillsborough.ifas.ufl.edu)
Search under Safe Food.

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