2.2 Planning, preparation and cooking techniques

These notes cover section 2.2 Planning, preparation and cooking techniques, which includes:

- 2.2.1 Food production process
- 2.2.2 Planning to create food items
- 2.2.3 Skills and techniques within food production
- 2.2.4 Hygiene practices and procedures within food production.

2.2.1 Food production process

When developing meals for assessment, it is essential that planning is approached with the mind-set of a real food developer. This means showing not only what you intend to make, but why each decision has been made. Planning should demonstrate a clear understanding of the production process, from initial concept to finished dish, including recipe testing and refinement. Evidence of practical reasoning, and thoughtful justification should be demonstrated throughout the work.

The practical assessment task will ask you to respond to a scenario that changes annually. It isn't enough to simply list ideas; an understanding of the audience, as well as any food trend or other specific criteria must be demonstrated, with justifications for each choice made clear. You must also be creative, but realistic and cost aware.

Top tip

Before you submit your work, consider each of these questions.

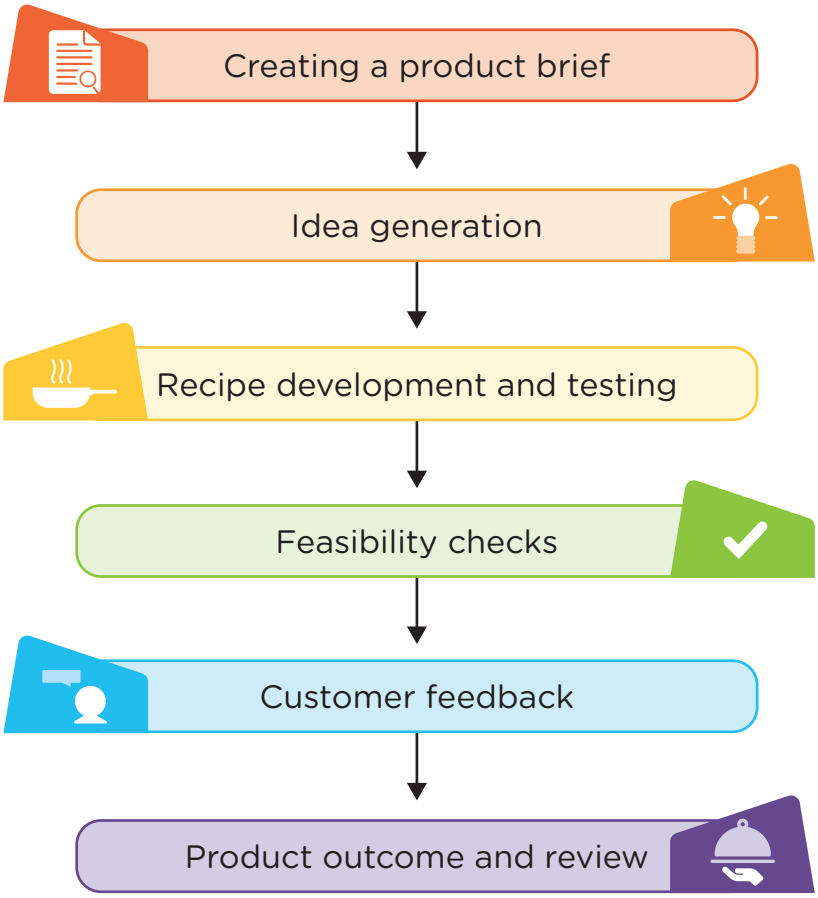
Have you...

- analysed and broken down the brief into clear tasks?
- explained ideas like a professional food developer?
- applied trends to real dishes?
- made justified decisions about ingredients, cost, presentation and pricing?
- trialled, tested and developed recipes?
- produced rationales that show genuine understanding rather than just description?
- created detailed food production plans?
- executed advanced food production and presentation skills?
- evaluated final dishes against the original brief?

Food development and production must consider the intended audience, current food trends, ingredient suitability, cost, nutrition and presentation. Planning documents must show how the dishes meet the requirements of the brief and how you intend to prepare and produce them safely and efficiently. This includes:

- outlining adjustments and refinements during development
- ingredients needed
- equipment
- timings
- hygiene and safety considerations
- contingencies.

The steps involved in the food production process



1. **Creating a product brief** (considering the produce, target audience and market, cost)
2. **Idea generation** (considering market research, current trends)
3. **Recipe development and testing** (including amendments and reasons for amends)
4. **Feasibility checks** (considering cost and feasibility of ingredients and packaging, production times)
5. **Customer feedback** (such as taste panel review and cost review)
6. **Product outcome and review** (considering amendments).

This section is an opportunity to demonstrate depth of understanding and your ability to work methodically and professionally. By clearly explaining choices and showing how dishes have been designed, tested and refined, you will be able to present a well-reasoned and fully justified plan that supports the successful execution of complex food production and presentation techniques.

The different aspects that should be included in preparing a solution to a food development and production brief are explained below, followed by information about how to ensure that each aspect includes a detailed rationale and evaluation.

Product brief

When a scenario and task are presented, it is vital to be clear what products are going to be developed and produced, who they are aimed at, along with clear reasons for all development and production decisions. The product brief includes details of a target audience and might also include food item and selling costs, a food trend, health concerns or nutritional needs.

The target audience is the group of people the product is intended for, for example young adults on a budget; working professionals looking for convenience; families with young children; luxury restaurant diners; fitness-focused adults; and older adults with a specific health need. A food trend is the style of the diet, for example plant-based eating; high-protein diets; fusion cuisine; sustainable eating; small plate dining; and functional foods. A nutritional need refers to the specific nutritional requirements of a group of people. It is important to understand the nutritional and practical needs of the target audience, as well as any other details provided by the brief and the links between them.

Top tip

Link your target audience's specific needs to every other piece of information provided in the brief.

Identify the product/food items and the reasons for development

Being clear about the product that is being developed and the reasons for doing so can be achieved by analysing the assessment brief and scenario. Demonstrating a clear understanding of the target audience and any food trend or other need is essential to ensure that the final products selected are relevant and appropriate.

Highlighting key words in the product brief (for example, **older adults**, **shelf-stable**, **high fibre**, **low cost**) will help ensure that every decision that follows is purposeful, justified and aligned with the assessment requirements.

The assessment brief will provide details of:

- who the target audience is
- what problem or needs the products you produce must address
- any other constraints (for example, dietary requirements, equipment, cost).

Common pitfall

Not fully understanding the key points outlined in the assessment brief from the start increases the risk of developing and choosing products that do not meet the correct criteria.

Identify the intended audience and target market

This section needs clarity, detail and professional thinking. Including details of the intended target audience (for example, age range, lifestyle, spending habits, food preferences, motivations and barriers) shows a clear understanding of the assessment brief and who the product is aimed at.

Top tip

Look beyond the written brief! Consider real-world factors that naturally affect your target audience, such as:

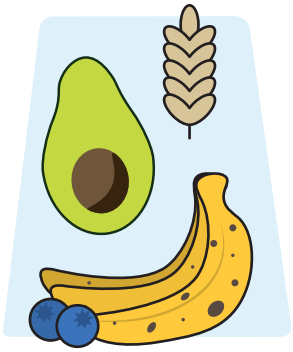
- **Eco-conscious consumers:** These consumers may be seeking local, seasonal ingredients with lower environmental impact and minimal waste.
- **Older adults:** These individuals may have specific health needs (like increased calcium for bone health) while living on a fixed, limited income.

When analysing a food or consumer trend, detailing the reasons behind its popularity sets the scene for successful product development. Your analysis should cover:

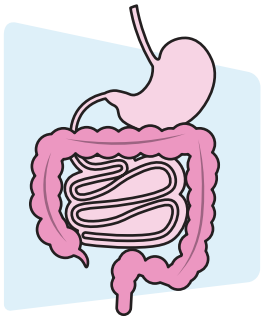
- **The trend:** What the trend is and why it is popular.
- **Consumer expectations:** What consumers expect from the trend or what they expect to gain from it.
- **Product impact:** How it directly influences ingredient choices, cooking methods, costs and presentation.

Examples of emerging food trends

Protein power



Fibre forward



Gut friendly

When addressing specific **nutritional**, **health** or **lifestyle needs**, you must detail exactly how they affect the target audience. Your analysis should explain why these needs exist, specify which foods consumers need to avoid or increase, and outline why and how these requirements influence food production methods, costs and presentation. Once stated, details of the scenario can be expanded upon to include topics such as health concerns, cost of living, social media influence, convenience, environmental concerns, cultural shifts and popularity with a certain age group.

You should show how these factors interconnect in real-world food production. For example, high-protein diets are popular because people want meals that keep them fuller for longer, help with weight management, and support active lifestyles. People choosing eco-friendly meals expect visible sustainability clues such as seasonal produce, recyclable packaging, and minimal food waste in dishes. Chefs use the whole vegetable (for example, skins, stalks, tops) in their cooking to reduce waste. Plant-based proteins like lentils are cheap, helping keep menu prices low for value-conscious customers. Natural colours, rustic plating, and minimal packaging emphasise sustainability. Increasing calcium intake is often achieved through dairy products, but these can be high in saturated fat, making them less suitable for older adults. They may also be relatively expensive, so alternative calcium sources must be sourced.

Final product/food item costs

Cost is an influencing factor in all product development; therefore, a product brief should include guidance on production and selling costs. Researching the cost of similar existing products produced in comparable establishments can help establish these costs.

Including cost limitations or guidance in a product brief helps keep development realistic and focused. Knowing the budget from the start facilitates the choice of ingredients and methods that are affordable and appropriate, preventing the development of ideas that cannot be realistically produced. Cost guidance also helps ensure that the product matches what the target market can afford, ensuring that the final outcome is suitable for the consumer group.

Two co-workers in aprons reviewing receipts

Cost guidance also encourages efficient thinking and working; comparing ingredient options, reducing waste and planning carefully is essential for product development in the food industry. Having clear cost boundaries also makes it easier to justify decisions throughout the process, because your ingredient selection and recipe adaptations can be linked to budget (as well as the practical and nutritional needs of the target audience).

Top tip

You might consider the following factors:

- Packaging costs should not exceed 50p per unit to allow maximum budget for ingredients.
- Ingredient costs must stay under £3 per portion (or £10 for the entire recipe) to maintain affordability.
- Market pricing should remain budget-friendly and competitive with similar products, which range from £3.50 to £4.50.

Idea generation

Each idea needs to be linked back to the audience and any consumer trend, nutritional need or lifestyle factor. A range of assessed and evaluated initial ideas helps to ensure that the final choice of dishes is the best option for the brief.

You will need to research your target audience to establish their preferences. This can be achieved by conducting **market research**: online or in person using a questionnaire, survey or interviews. This could establish taste or food preferences, portion size, or preferred culinary styles, among other things.

Stated ideas should include the name of the dish, the main ingredients, how it meets any trend, nutritional need or other factor and why the audience will like it. Ensure that ideas include details linking them back to previously identified factors from the brief. See the tables on the next page for examples.

Dishes linked to the brief

Example 1		Link to audience/trend/need
Starter:	Charred corn ribs with chilli lime glaze	Fun, shareable, TikTok style, plant based
Main:	Lentil mushroom burger with loaded toppings	Familiar format with sustainable protein
Dessert:	Vegan Biscoff cheesecake	Indulgent, 'Instagrammable' and dairy free

Example 2		Link to audience/trend/need
Starter:	Vegetable-packed tomato soup with hidden lentils	Hidden vegetables and protein for extra nutritional value
Main:	Build your own burrito bowls	Child-friendly and customisable
Dessert:	Fruit crumble with reduced-sugar oat topping	Reduced sugar

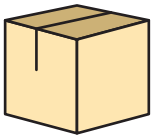
A range of ideas should be evaluated against the brief, the needs of the target audience and all other criteria in the assessment brief. This could be achieved with a 'select and reject' table based on specific criteria.

Feasibility checks

Feasibility checks help to determine whether a product idea is practical, achievable and suitable before further development. They ensure that the concept can realistically be produced within the requirements of the brief.

Cost, availability and feasibility of ingredients

Checking the cost, availability and feasibility of ingredients confirms that the recipe can be made within budget and that all ingredients are accessible. This prevents the use of items that are too expensive, unavailable or impractical, helping to keep the product appropriate for the intended purpose.



Cost and feasibility of packaging

Reviewing the cost and feasibility of packaging or presentation ensures that the final product can be packaged or displayed correctly without exceeding financial or resource limits. This step is especially important when the product is intended to be sold, transported or presented in a particular way.

Production times

Assessing production times ensures that the product can be prepared, cooked and completed within the time available. This helps confirm that the recipe is manageable both in a timed practical assessment and in real-world production settings.

Recipe development and testing

You could trial or test some recipe ideas to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Recipe development and testing begins with the creation of an initial recipe based on the brief, the needs of the target audience and the ideas that you considered. At this stage, ingredients, quantities, equipment and methods are selected that reflect the information gathered so far – producing a first draft that is expected to be refined as the process continues.

A professional chef seasoning a dish

Recipe trialling, testing and any feedback obtained are **not** included in the assessment criteria or the allocated assessment time. However, you can choose to trial recipes outside of assessment hours and include the results in your assignment to help justify your developmental decisions.

After the recipe has been planned, it could be tested by preparing and cooking it exactly as written. This practical test shows how well the recipe works in real conditions and means that any issues with flavour, texture, timing or suitability for the intended consumer can be identified.

Once the test is complete, amendments can be made to improve the product. Including a detailed rationale for all amendments and changes is essential. Adjustments may involve altering ingredient amounts, changing cooking times or methods, or improving nutritional or sensory qualities. These amendments demonstrate an ability to evaluate, refine and improve the product based on evidence.

Recipes can be developed without testing or trialling if existing practical cookery knowledge and experience exists. This could include adapting ingredients to cater for allergies, lifestyles and nutritional needs.

Customer feedback

Customer feedback is used to check how well a product meets the expectations of the people it is intended for. It provides real opinions from potential consumers and helps identify what is working well and what needs improvement.

Customer feedback can be obtained with or without cooking the dishes. Organoleptic properties can only be assessed by cooking a trial dish, but many factors – for example general appeal and cost – can be established without it.

Collecting customer feedback can be combined with recipe testing. A taste panel review after testing a recipe involves asking a group of people to try the product and comment on qualities such as flavour, texture, appearance and aroma. This helps identify strengths and weaknesses in the sensory characteristics and guides further refinement to improve overall quality and appeal.

A cost review examines whether the product offers good value for money from a consumer's perspective. Feedback should reveal whether the price is appropriate, too high or too low, and whether the product seems worth the cost. This helps ensure that the final product is affordable, competitive and suitable for its intended market.

Product and outcome review

A product or outcome review is carried out to evaluate how well the developed product meets the expectations set out in the brief and how effectively it performs after practical (if relevant) or theoretical testing and customer feedback. This stage helps identify any areas that may require refinement to improve the final result.

Amendments to ingredients may be made when feedback highlights issues with flavour, texture, appearance or performance. For example, if a taste panel reports that the product is too sweet, too dry or lacking flavour, specific ingredient adjustments can be made to correct these issues.

Amendments could also be made if feedback reports that the cost is too high; changing ingredients and/or production methods can reduce costs. Alternatively, if feedback reports that the nutritional profile is unfit for purpose, ingredients can be adapted.

Each change is based on evidence gathered from testing and/or feedback, ensuring that any amendments strengthen the product's suitability, quality and appeal. This process demonstrates thoughtful development, showing that the final product has been improved in direct response to customer insight and practical outcomes.

Rationale and evaluation

When developing a product, all decisions should be backed by a clear rationale linked directly to evidence. Your justification should explain why the dish fits a specific trend, why the audience would choose it, and why the presentation is appropriate. Additionally, you must justify your ingredient choices by considering health requirements; specific dietary needs; links to current food trends; cost; market availability; and waste reduction.

A strong rationale connects all these points together. It does not simply list features – it explains why those features matter, how they relate to the given scenario, and how exactly they meet the needs of the target audience. The rationale should also consider the factors identified in the brief or from your own research, development and idea generation.

Top tips

When completing the initial stages of the NEA, you will need to produce the following:

- **A product brief:** Explicitly identify your target audience, outline key information about your selected food trend, and think of ideas for dishes that you could prepare and cook.
- **A detailed rationale:** Justify how ideas for dishes meet the brief. This should include your market research on current food trends, ingredients selected, ingredient cost estimations, approximate final sale cost, and intended presentation methods.

Remember to:

- demonstrate detailed knowledge of your target audience and apply this directly to the brief
- present innovative ideas clearly linked to the task, with justifications for your choices
- evaluate and analyse your selected food trend in relation to your target audience
- justify all elements of your ideas, focusing on the selection of ingredients, financial estimations and final presentation.

2.2.2 Planning to create food items

A food production plan saves time, maintains consistent quality, and protects health and safety by organising the entire process before any cooking begins. By planning ingredients, equipment, timings and workflow in advance, the kitchen can operate more efficiently while avoiding delays, confusion or mistakes.

Before planning, detailed recipes need to be finalised. Each recipe needs a specific list of ingredients with quantities, equipment needed and portion sizes. The recipe could also detail the method for creating the final food items. For ease of shopping and gathering equipment, many recipes can be combined into one list. An exemplar layout for recipe details is shown below, with allergens highlighted in bold for clarity.

Dish 1: Lemon cheesecake (serves 6)

Ingredients	Equipment
110g **digestive biscuits**	Scales
50g **butter**	Plastic bag
25g light brown soft sugar	Rolling pin
350g **mascarpone**	Small saucepan
75g caster sugar	Tablespoon
3 lemons (zest from 1, juice from all 3)	Zester
	Large bowl
	Green board
	Paring knife
	Wooden spoon
	Table knife
	Palette knife
	Chef rings × 6
	Greaseproof paper
	White tray

Dish 2: Savoury tomato and mushroom tart (serves 6)

Ingredients	Equipment
250g **butter**	Scales
150g **cheddar cheese**	Large saucepan with lid
250g strong plain **flour**	Teaspoon
100g tomatoes	Dessert spoon
50g mushrooms	Small heatproof bowl
	Brown board
	Paring knife
	Wooden spoon × 2
	Greaseproof paper for 3 trays
	White tray × 3

Combined ingredients and equipment list (Total: 12 portions)

Ingredients	Equipment
110g **digestive biscuits**	Scales
300g **butter** (50g + 250g)	Plastic bag
25g light brown soft sugar	Rolling pin
350g **mascarpone**	Small saucepan
75g caster sugar	Large saucepan with lid
150g **cheddar cheese**	Tablespoon
250g strong plain **flour**	Teaspoon
100g tomatoes	Dessert spoon
50g mushrooms	Zester
3 lemons	Large bowl
	Small heatproof bowl
	Green board
	Brown board
	Paring knife × 2
	Wooden spoon × 3
	Table knife
	Palette knife
	Chef rings × 6
	Greaseproof paper for 4 trays
	White tray × 4

Nutritional information (**see section 1.1.3 Classify nutrients in food in Unit 1 for further information**) can be calculated and included at either the development or planning stage of a product. While nutritional information is not generally required by law for 'loose' foods (not packaged), any information provided voluntarily must follow the same rules that apply to pre-packaged foods.

By law, packaged food labelling must display the following nutrients, formatted per **100g or 100ml** and presented in this order:

1. Energy (kJ and kcal)
2. Fat
3. Saturates
4. Carbohydrates
5. Sugars
6. Protein
7. Salt

Nutrition

	Per 100g	Per 569g portion	RI*
Energy	451kJ	2567kJ	30%
Fat	107kcal	608kcal	17%
Saturated fat	0.7g	4.2g	21%
Carbohydrate	15g	84g	11%
Total sugars	1.8g	10g	11%
Protein	7.5g	43g	23%
Fibre	1.0g	5.6g	42%
Salt	0.4g	2.5g	42%

*RI = Reference Intake (adult)

Example of a nutritional information label

Information about nutrients per portion may also be included; however, this is not a legal requirement. On pre-packed foods, if a specific nutrient is mentioned in the product's title or if a nutritional claim is made (for example, 'high in vitamin D'), that specific nutrient must be included in the nutrition table. Various online programmes and apps are available to calculate nutritional content and create nutritional tables.

A well-designed plan, which includes planning **timings** in advance, ensures efficiency as staff know exactly what needs to be done and in what order. For example, if a chef is preparing a lasagne and a soup for service, the plan may show that the soup stock should be prepared first because it requires a long simmer; chopping vegetables for the lasagne can happen during that time. This **sequencing**, called dovetailing, prevents wasted time and ensures the kitchen works smoothly. Setting timers is another method that can be used when preparing different elements of a dish. Planning also means all ingredients are weighed and prepared ahead of time, reducing the need to stop mid task to gather equipment or search for missing items. **Contingency plans** are included in the plan to prevent panic and ensure that time is not wasted trying to solve issues that could have been anticipated.

Example of a dovetailed sequenced plan

Quality is maintained by a clear production plan as it ensures recipes are followed consistently. Portion sizes, ingredient quantities, and cooking times are all determined in advance, leading to uniform results across every batch. For example, if a batch of muffins requires precise baking window to rise correctly, having the timings set in the plan ensures they are baked for the correct duration each time.

Quality points should also be included at critical stages of the plan. These control measures include:

- **Physical checks:** Verifying uniform portion sizes and dimensions.
- **Sensory checks:** Tasting a sauce at key stages.
- **Safety checks:** Checking the internal temperature of cooked food.

A chef tasting a dish during food preparation

Beyond taste and cooking precision, the plan should outline appearance and presentation requirements. If the food item requires packaging, this should also be detailed to indicate the final presentation of the product.

Food hygiene and safety are supported when the plan incorporates food safety and hygiene controls throughout every stage of the process. This includes identifying when raw foods are handled, when surfaces must be cleaned and sanitised, and how ingredients should be stored before and after preparation.

For instance, if a dish involves preparing raw chicken alongside a salad, the plan must ensure that the ready-to-eat foods are handled first, followed by raw meat. The plan should also highlight where allergens are present and how cross-contamination will be prevented. Clear steps for safe storage – such as rapid cooling of cooked items or storing chilled ingredients below 5 °C until needed – ensure the food remains safe.

Waste management strategies and procedures should be included to maintain health, safety and hygiene. For instance, food scraps and rubbish should be removed before they attract pests or cause contamination. Keeping waste separated, covered and regularly disposed of ensures the production area stays clean, safe and hygienic for all food-handling tasks.

In practice, a good food production plan ensures that tasks are done in the correct order, equipment is used efficiently, food is produced consistently, and safety standards are met at every stage. This makes the kitchen safer, more productive, and more capable of consistently delivering high quality food to customers.

Excerpts from production plans are included here to support your learning and understanding. These are examples only and can be used for revision purposes. Please also note that these examples do not relate to a specific production plan.

Advance preparation/mise en place	Notes
Waste management • Check that waste bins are present, clean, covered and in the right place. • If separate containers are provided for different types of waste, note what should go where.	
Personal and surface hygiene • Tie up hair, wash hands, and put on an apron or chef whites. • Clean and sanitise all work surfaces. • Collect clean cloths for washing equipment, sanitising work surfaces and drying up.	
Ingredient and temperature checks • Check and record fridge and freezer temperatures. • Cross-check all ingredients and quantities against recipes. • Store high-risk perishable foods in the correct location in the fridge, and frozen ingredients in the freezer.	**Critical storage temperatures** • Chilled storage: Under 5 °C. • Frozen storage: Minimum –18 °C.
Equipment and weighing • Check that equipment is clean and functioning correctly. • Test scales for accuracy. • Weigh ingredients, label (if needed), group into recipes, and keep them covered.	**Weighing precision** Ensure 'Tare' function is used to obtain the product's net weight.

Time	Order of work
09:15	• Sieve 250g plain flour, a pinch of salt and 2g caster sugar into a large mixing bowl. Stir in 4g fast-action yeast.
	• Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients.
	• Measure 150ml milk in a plastic jug and warm in the microwave on high for 30 seconds. Stir to distribute the heat evenly.
	• Check that it the milk is hand-hot; heat for another 15 seconds if needed.
	• Stir the milk again, then pour into the flour well.
	• Mix well then turn out onto a clean, dry, floured surface and knead for 10 minutes.

Critical control points (CCP)	
Hazard area	**Required action**
Raw meat handling/ biological hazard	Handling raw meat is a high-risk step. It must be kept separate from ready-to-eat foods and prepared first in the workflow to prevent cross-contamination.
Allergen and ingredient control	Mousse contains dairy and potential allergens; all equipment must be allergen-clean to prevent accidental exposure.
Waste management and cross-contamination	Remove all chicken trimmings, packaging and any other contaminated waste immediately into covered, designated waste bins. The area must be cleaned and sanitised before moving on to subsequent steps. Prevent raw chicken juice from contaminating vegetables, utensils or surfaces later in the recipe. Wash hands thoroughly before continuing food preparation.

Quality control points
• Even layers.
• Correct depth.
• Clean presentation.
• All components at safe temperatures.
• All four must be exactly the same size; use the prepared template to double check.
• Ensure that the pastry is not stretched as this will cause shrinkage.

Contingencies
• Spare eggs in case of breakages.
• Spare fresh produce in case of damage (for example, bruising) in transit.
• Spare ingredients for the sauce in case it splits. If the sauce splits, re-start.
• If the pie is not cooked (min 75°C) return to the oven; delay cooking the carrots as a result.

Safety/hygiene	
Area of focus	**Checklist**
Waste management	• Scrape all food from plates, pans and equipment into the correct waste bin. • Follow recycling or food waste separation requirements.
Equipment washdown	• Wash all equipment thoroughly: hot soapy water, rinse, sanitise if required, and dry. • Check higher-risk items such as chopping boards, knives and mixers for food residue in hard-to-reach areas and clean again if necessary. • Put all clean equipment back in the correct storage areas, ensuring knives, boards and electrical equipment are stored safely and hygienically.
Workstation surfaces	• Wipe down work surfaces using the two-stage method: clean then sanitise. • Clean the hob, oven front, microwave or grill if used, removing spills, grease and burnt-on food to prevent contamination and maintain equipment safety. • Wash and sanitise sinks, taps and draining boards, ensuring no food waste or grease is left behind.
Floor care and bins	• Clean and dry any spills on floors and then sweep and mop the area around your workstation using appropriate cleaning materials. • Empty the bin if it is nearing full, replace the liner and ensure the bin lid can close properly to prevent pests and odours.
Final checks	• Check allergen controls by cross-checking that all allergen-related equipment and surfaces have been washed and sanitised correctly. • Perform a final check of the workstation to ensure it is fully clean, dry, tidy and safe for the next user.

Chef wiping down kitchen surfaces

2.2.3 Skills and techniques within food production

The practical assessment gives you an opportunity to showcase your skills and working methods. The assessment covers health and safety (**see section 2.2.4 Hygiene practices and procedures within food production below for further information**), preparation and cooking skills, and presentation. You need to demonstrate a range of advanced preparation, cooking and presentation skills and techniques. You should also select a range of techniques and skills to demonstrate versatility. Basic, medium and advanced skills are listed in the specification and teaching guidance; some of these are discussed in this section when specific dishes are used as examples. Often, recipes that you find will need to be upskilled so that you can demonstrate a broader understanding of the task at hand.

Preparation, knife and cooking techniques

A variety of advanced preparation, knife and cooking skills need to be used when preparing a dish. Upskilling recipes can simply mean swapping a pre-made or pre-prepared item for one made in the practical assessment. For example, you could swap bought pastry for self-made pastry or a packet of chicken breasts for a chicken that you portion yourself. It can also involve adding accompaniments, for example making a mayonnaise from scratch during the exam time; adding brunoise vegetables; or adding a self-made custard, sweet sauce or ice cream. Examples are shown in this section to demonstrate the process of upskilling recipes.

Case study: Upskilling a tomato bruschetta

Tomato bruschetta is a basic-skill dish involving simple chopping, mixing and toasting.

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- add a balsamic reduction for plating
- toast bread using a griddle to create defined char lines
- make your own bread.

Basic tomato bruschetta

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- use a brunoise chopping technique to obtain uniformed tomato cubes
- make a basil chiffonade as a garnish
- pipe ricotta
- divide the dough into three or five flavours, then plait them, like challah bread, before cooking as a loaf (**verging on an advanced skill**).

Bruschetta using brunoise and the addition of a balsamic reduction

Case study: Upskilling grilled mackerel

Grilled mackerel involves basic knife skills (trimming), simple seasoning, basic grilling and basic plating.

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- fillet the mackerel
- serve it with pickled onion and a herb oil
- lightly cure it in salt and citrus and then torch the skin until crisp.

Whole grilled mackerel with rice

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- serve it with a salad of segmented orange or grapefruit, fine shredded herbs and pickled shallot
- serve it with an aerated dressing, piped or spooned with precision.

Pan-fried mackerel fillet, served with colourful vegetables and a white cream

Case study: Upskilling a cheese soufflé

A standard cheese soufflé touches on advanced skills because of the whisking and folding. However, it doesn't meet all advanced skill criteria if a basic all-in-one or ready-made cheese sauce is used.

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- add spinach and herbs to the recipe, managing the process carefully to squeeze excess moisture from the spinach
- make a roux-based cheese sauce.

Cheese soufflé

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- serve it with a side salad featuring a chiffonade preparation skill or brunoise vegetables
- make a twice-baked soufflé by adding cream or cheese sauce on the second baking
- use advanced plating such as an emulsified dressing or foam sauce.

Twice-baked cheese soufflé with salad garnish

Case study: Upskilling pasta

A standard lasagne made with a ready-made bolognese sauce, a jar of cheese sauce and dried lasagne sheets is classed as a basic-skill dish. However, this can be upgraded to advanced skills if you make the components from scratch.

Lasagne

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- make a roux-based cheese sauce
- produce a rich, reduced bolognese sauce
- serve it with accompaniments such as julienned carrots and beans.

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- make your own pasta sheets
- serve it with accompaniments such as a fine chiffonade of assorted leafy greens and herbs to add texture and aroma
- incorporate colours to the pasta with natural dye powders
- shape the pasta into ravioli or tortellini shapes.

Tri-colour lemon garlic tortellini

Case study: Upskilling stuffed and rolled chicken breasts and legs

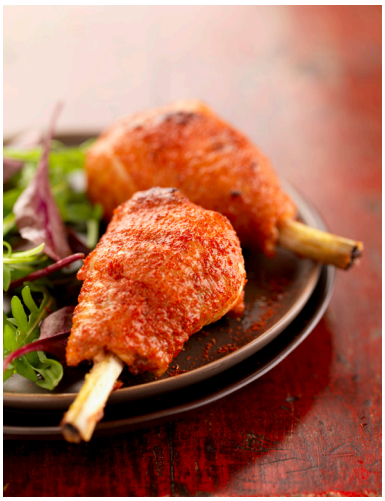
To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- add intricate accompaniments, sauces and garnishes.

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- portion a whole, raw chicken from scratch before preparing the breasts or legs
- French-bone and stuff the chicken legs.

Stuffed and rolled chicken breasts



French-boned chicken legs

Case study: Upskilling Asian dumplings (dim sum)

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- mince and prepare raw fillings carefully to ensure that they don't break the dough
- caramelise onions.

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- joint and portion a whole raw chicken
- portion a whole, fresh fish from scratch.

Dumplings

Case study: Laminated pastry

Making laminated pastry from scratch is an **advanced skill** that can be used for both sweet and savoury dishes. Incorporating additional skills when preparing the filling, accompaniments and garnishes adds to the complexity of the dish, ensuring access to all available marks.

To further upskill this recipe, you could:

- incorporate intricate pastry presentation work, such as a braided plait
- create an accompaniment such as a fruit reduction coulis
- apply an intricate royal icing design
- prepare a high-skill filling, such as mincing your own pork
- showcase precision knife skills, such as julienning vegetables
- elevate your presentation with garnishes like segmented fruits.

Caramelised red onion and cheese tart

Apple strudel

Case study: Upskilling a lemon tart

A standard lemon tart includes a blind-baked pastry case and a set filling.

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- churn a self-made ice cream
- create a rich, glossy chocolate sauce.

Lemon tart with Italian meringue

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- add an intricate French, Italian or Swiss meringue topping
- temper a custard to serve alongside the tart
- decorate with segmented fruit.

Lemon tart decorated with ice cream and a biscuit crumb

Case study: Upskilling poached fruit

Poaching fruit is an excellent way to offer a healthier dessert option on a menu. Because it requires care and precision, it enables you to demonstrate medium to advanced skills.

To demonstrate **medium skill** levels, you could:

- churn self-made ice cream
- make your own egg custard.

Skills can be extended to include **advanced skills** by:

- producing a spiced sabayon.

Halved poached pears

Case study: Upskilling a mousse

To upskill this to a **medium skill** level, you could:

- add a biscuit crumb.

To upskill this to an **advanced skill** level, you could:

- incorporate aeration
- use foaming to create a light texture
- work with tempered chocolate to create shards.

Chocolate dome mousse with chocolate sauce

Chocolate cup filled with mousse and topped with cream, fruit and spun sugar

Top tip

You should include a varied range of advanced skills in preparation, cooking and presenting foods. Repeated skills are only credited once.

Presentation techniques

Presentation techniques play a crucial role in transforming well-prepared food into visually appealing and memorable dishes. These techniques allow you to express creativity, highlight ingredients and enhance the overall dining experience through thoughtful arrangement and attention to detail. Comments on the practicality of plating during service could also be included to show a consideration of consistency and real world application. For example, 'Dessert layered in a clear glass to highlight colours for social media appeal'.

Techniques such as piping, carving, shaping and moulding enable precise control over form, helping to create decorative elements, clean lines and refined structures on the plate. Using knife skills, correct placement and piping skills for garnishes and decorations adds interest, visual appeal and skills. Glazing adds shine, moisture and an attractive finish, ensuring ingredients appear vibrant and appetising. Examples of some of these techniques are shown in this section.

Piped mash potato, which has then been deep fried

A glazed pie

A rose-carved tomato

A carved cucumber and apple salad

Contemporary approaches, including the landscape technique and Nordic technique, encourage naturalistic, minimalist and seasonally-inspired plating styles. These methods often involve organic materials such as wooden boards or natural surfaces, which introduce an earthy, rustic aesthetic and support modern trends in sustainable presentation.

Landscape plating uses natural colours, tells a story and often places food horizontally across the plate.

Nordic plating is minimalistic, using earthy colours and natural materials.

Here, a steak tartare is served with quail egg yolks on a wooden board, giving a rustic yet modern aesthetic.

Creating height adds dimension and visual interest by drawing the eye and making the dish feel dynamic. Understanding plating techniques, such as balance, proportion, negative space and focal points, allows for compositions that feel harmonious and intentional.

Colour and texture contrast further elevate presentation by adding visual excitement, enhancing clarity and helping each component stand out.

Together, these techniques provide a foundation for producing dishes that are visually striking, coherent in style and reflective of professional culinary standards. The specification and teaching guidance provide examples of presentation techniques. You should plan these in advance and practice the techniques before the practical assessment.

Timbale of saffron rice

Top tip

Including reference images of beautifully-plated dishes alongside your plans is an excellent way to communicate your vision.

2.2.4 Hygiene practices and procedures within food production

Your practical assessment will focus on your ability to maintain:

- high levels of personal hygiene
- correct food safety practices and procedures
- safe working practices
- correct temperatures for food storage
- cross-contamination prevention
- good cleaning and sanitation procedures.

Maintaining personal hygiene

Personal hygiene is essential in food preparation because food handlers can easily transfer harmful bacteria, viruses and physical contaminants to food. High standards of hygiene reduce the risk of food poisoning, protect consumers, and ensure legal compliance. Below are the key aspects of maintaining excellent personal hygiene.

A person washing soapy hands under running water at a sink

Hands are often the most common route for transferring pathogens such as E. coli, salmonella and viruses onto foods. Effective handwashing removes dirt and microorganisms, therefore preventing cross-contamination. Handwashing recommendations include using warm water and antibacterial soap, cleaning between fingers, under nails and up to the wrists, then drying with disposable paper towels. This should be completed before handling any foods and after using the toilet, touching raw food, coughing, sneezing or touching the face or hair.

A food worker wearing a face mask, apron and blue disposable gloves

Gloves are recommended in certain situations and certain food industries (for example, an abattoir). Though gloves are often used for serving ready-to-eat foods, contamination can still occur if other personal hygiene routines are not followed. It can also be argued that people feel safer when wearing gloves and are, therefore, less careful about basic hygiene procedures. If used, gloves need to be changed frequently otherwise they carry the same risks as dirty hands.

A bakery worker wearing a hairnet and striped apron

Hair, which can easily fall into food, carries bacteria, creating both a physical and microbiological hazard. For this reason, long hair should always be tied back, and a hat or hairnet worn. Beard nets are also used for facial hair as this poses the same hazard as hair on the head.

Clean skin and nails reduce the risk of shedding bacterial or physical contaminants (for example, skin flakes, nail fragments) into food. Therefore, daily bathing/showering is essential along with keeping nails short, clean and unpolished. Strong perfumes or aftershaves should also be avoided.

Protective clothing (for example, chef's whites, aprons and specialised kitchen uniforms) prevents hair fibres and dirt from external environments from dropping into the food. It also protects the food handlers' own clothes from contamination (but this is a secondary reason for its use).

Jewellery traps dirt and bacteria, which can then fall into food or tear protective gloves (if worn). Jewellery worn on the hands and wrists also makes effective hand washing difficult. Therefore, by law, the only permitted jewellery in a kitchen environment is a plain wedding band. All other jewellery should be removed before hands are washed and food preparation begins.

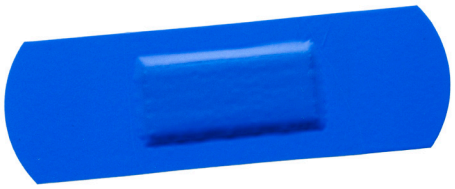
A simple band on the ring finger

Illnesses such as norovirus, food poisoning and any others that cause sickness and diarrhoea can result in bacteria being transferred from the food handler to the food. As a result, symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, fever or skin infections must be reported and policies adhered to.

Key fact

Sick staff should be excluded from handling food for 48 hours from the last symptom.

Broken skin can harbour large numbers of bacteria, which can get into food or onto equipment. Open wounds also increase the risk of pus, blood, or skin cells contaminating food, creating both a physical and microbiological hazard. All cuts and wounds should be covered with a blue waterproof plaster, which are easily detectable in food and, in some industries, contain a magnet for detection in automated food production systems. If wounds are not properly covered with a blue, waterproof, detectable plaster and kept clean, they can become a direct source of infection, putting consumers at risk of serious illness.



Blue catering plaster

Some personal behaviours increase the risks of cross-contamination from the food handler to the food and, therefore, the consumer. These risks include:

- smoking
- vaping
- chewing gum
- using a mobile phone
- touching the hair, face or glasses
- drinking or eating in food areas.

These actions can cause bacteria to move from the hands, mouth or external objects into the food preparation area and therefore into the food.

Following safe working practices and adhering to correct food safety practices and procedures

Food handlers must follow food safety legislation, such as the Food Safety Act (1990) and HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) procedures. These frameworks help identify potential hazards and outline steps to control them. Staff must also follow workplace policies, training and reporting procedures to ensure consistent and safe food handling.

Documentation

Record-keeping and documentation also form part of safe working practices. Even when the main food safety procedures are outlined elsewhere, maintaining accurate records, such as delivery checks, equipment maintenance logs, training records, and food safety reviews, helps ensure procedures are followed consistently. Regularly reviewing documentation allows managers to identify areas for improvement and ensure the food safety management system remains effective.

Chef checking storage temperatures and 'use by'/'best before' dates of items

Training and supervision

Staff training and supervision underpin all safe working practices. All team members should receive appropriate instructions and training on how to work safely, understand their responsibilities, and know the correct procedures for their role. Ongoing supervision and refresher training help reinforce good habits and support a culture of safety and professionalism within the catering environment.

Head chef instructing a trainee chef as part of staff training

Safe kitchen layout and facilities

Safe working practices also involve maintaining a safe physical environment. This includes:

- keeping floors clean and dry
- storing equipment properly
- using correct lifting techniques
- ensuring good ventilation and lighting.

Preventing slips, trips, burns and cuts protects staff and contributes to an efficient, safe workplace.

Chefs preparing food in a well-designed industrial kitchen

A well-designed kitchen supports hygiene and safety by allowing staff to work cleanly and avoid hazards. This means keeping food preparation areas well organised; ensuring there is a logical flow from raw to ready-to-eat processes; and providing adequate lighting, ventilation, and hand washing basins. Good structural maintenance, such as keeping floors, walls and equipment in sound condition, prevents accidents and makes cleaning easier.

Equipment

All mechanical and electrical equipment should be checked before use for temperature (if relevant), damage and cleanliness, and any faults should be reported. All equipment should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and workplace procedures. Safe use of appliances and tools such as knives, mixers and ovens reduces the risk of accidents and contamination (**see the cross-contamination prevention section further on in this section for more information**). All equipment should be maintained regularly to ensure reliability and items such as thermometers should be calibrated to ensure accuracy.

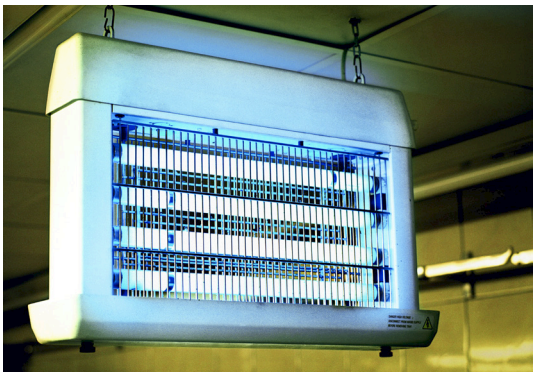
A technician inspecting the temperature of a commercial freezer

Pest prevention

Catering environments should be designed and managed in a way that prevents pests from entering and finding food sources. This includes:

- proper building maintenance
- secure storage of ingredients
- immediate clean up of spills
- good waste management practices.

Waste should be stored in suitable bins, emptied frequently, and kept away from food preparation areas to avoid attracting pests.


An electric, ceiling-mounted fly killer used for pest control in a kitchen

Staff safety

Beyond hygiene considerations, catering workplaces must ensure general health and safety for staff. Kitchens are high-risk environments, so safe working practices include preventing slips and trips, using correct manual handling techniques, storing equipment safely, and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment such as non-slip footwear and protective clothing. Staff should be trained to handle hot equipment and sharp tools safely and to report hazards promptly.

Key fact

Staff, customers and the business are protected through safe handling and HACCP systems.

A yellow 'Caution Wet Floor' sign placed on a tiled floor

Safe working practices are essential in any food preparation environment to protect consumers from foodborne illness, maintain high standards of hygiene, and comply with legal requirements. These practices ensure that food is handled, stored, cooked and served in ways that minimise the risk of contamination and promote a safe working environment for staff.

Storage and temperature control

Ingredients must be checked for quality, freshness and correct (in date) labelling before use (**refer back to 2.1.1 shelf life and storage facilities for more information on this**).

Safe storage includes:

- rotating stock using the FIFO (first in, first out) system
- storing allergens completely separately
- ensuring all food is labelled with 'use by' or 'best before' dates.

A chef organising glass spice jars

Proper storage prevents spoilage, reduces waste and ensures food safety.

Different categories of food require different storage conditions to stay safe and maintain quality. All high-risk foods are labelled with a 'use by' date, which means that foods must be consumed before this date.

Chilled foods

Chilled foods, such as cooked meats, dairy products, seafood and ready-to-eat items must be kept in the fridge at low temperatures, between 0 °C and 5 °C. Storing these foods in the fridge slows the growth of bacteria, which multiply rapidly at warmer temperatures, and helps ensure they remain safe to eat for their intended shelf life (**see the content under the heading 'Cross-contamination prevention' below for further details**). Foods should be covered to prevent them drying out or contaminating other foods, and they should also be spaced out to enable cold air to circulate properly. Hot food should not be placed in a fridge; it should be cooled as quickly as possible first to avoid raising the internal fridge temperature and pushing other foods into the 'danger zone' (**this is explained in more detail under the heading 'Temperature controls' below.**)

Frozen foods

Food items such as raw meat, vegetables, bread products and prepared meals must be stored in the freezer between −18 °C and −24 °C. At this temperature, bacterial growth is halted completely, which allows frozen foods to be kept for much longer periods. Keeping foods fully frozen also protects their texture and quality, meaning that they defrost safely when needed. Frozen foods should be defrosted in the fridge to ensure that their external temperature does not exceed 5 °C.

Large fridge-freezer

Ambient storage

Ambient storage is suitable for:

- tinned foods
- dry goods such as pasta, rice and flour
- oils
- vinegars
- most unopened packaged products.

These items are stable at room temperature because they are either dry, acidic or processed in a way that prevents bacteria from multiplying. Once opened, many ambient foods may require refrigeration, so it is important to follow the instructions on the packaging.

Packaged foods

Packaged foods often have different storage requirements once opened. Items such as sauces, dressings and condiments often need to be refrigerated after opening, even if they were stored at ambient temperature beforehand. Opened tinned foods should be removed from the can and placed into a clean, sealed container before being refrigerated. This helps prevent chemical reactions with the metal and reduces the risk of contamination.

Temperature control

Controlling temperature prevents the rapid growth of harmful microorganisms, ensuring that food remains safe to eat. Food should be kept out of the danger zone (5 °C–63 °C) as bacteria multiply rapidly at this temperature range. Specific temperatures and timings need to be adhered to, to ensure food safety.

Additionally, specific timings detail how long high-risk foods can be left at specific temperatures, for example:

- the amount of time different foods can be stored in the fridge or freezer
- how long food can be left at room temperature
- the time it should take for food to cool to fridge temperature after being cooked
- the maximum amount of time that food should be hot held for.

Signposting

Specific details of temperatures and timings can be found on the Food Standards Agency website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cooking-your-food/cooking-your-food

Food safety temperatures and time standards

Process	Temperature	Food safety guidance
Chilling food	0 °C to 5 °C	Chilling food at this temperature range slows the growth of bacteria.
Freezing food	−18 °C to −24 °C	Freezing food at this temperature range stops or slows the growth of bacteria.
Cooking food	>75 °C	The core temperature should be at least 75 °C for 30 seconds (or 70 °C for 2 minutes) to reduce pathogens to a safe level.
Hot holding	>63 °C	Food should be kept at this temperature during hot holding to ensure that minimal bacteria continue growing after food is cooked.
From cooked to chilled		Food should be chilled within 90 minutes of being cooked.
Defrosting food		Food should be defrosted in the fridge to avoid external temperatures exceeding 5 °C.
Hot holding		Food should be kept in hot holding for a maximum of 2 hours.
High-risk food left out at room temperature		High-risk food should be left out at room temperature for a maximum of 2 hours.

Temperature should be monitored carefully throughout the storage, preparation and cooking of foods. Food temperature probes should be used to check the core temperature of cooked foods. Foods should only ever be re-heated once; on cooking, pathogens are only ever reduced to safe levels, not completely destroyed. Therefore, numbers of pathogens increase with each re-heating.

Temperature probe testing the temperature of grilled burgers

Cross-contamination prevention

Cross-contamination occurs when harmful bacteria or allergens are transferred from one food, surface or piece of equipment to another.

- **Direct cross-contamination** happens when raw foods – especially raw meat, poultry or unwashed produce – come into direct contact with ready-to-eat foods.
- **Indirect cross-contamination** means that a 'vehicle' or item carries the bacteria from raw food to ready-to-eat food (for example, contaminated hands, dirty cloths, unclean equipment or poor storage practices).

Because cross-contamination spreads bacteria quickly and easily, it is one of the major causes of food poisoning in kitchens. Working practices must be established and adhered to that prevent both direct and indirect cross-contamination.

Preventing cross-contamination starts with keeping raw and ready-to-eat foods separate at all times:

- **Fridge storage:** You should always store raw meat, poultry and fish at the bottom of the fridge in sealed containers so that juices cannot drip onto other foods.
- **Tools and equipment:** Using separate chopping boards, knives and utensils for raw and cooked foods is especially important, as it prevents bacteria from transferring between different stages of food preparation. Colour-coded equipment is often used in catering to make this separation clear and consistent.

- **Hygiene and environment:** Good personal hygiene also plays a key role, as does the cleanliness of the environment and equipment.

Red	Blue	Yellow	Green	Brown	White	Purple
Raw meat	Raw fish	Cooked meat	Salad and fruit	Vegetables	Bakery and dairy	Allergens

Colour-coded chopping boards

Proper food storage is another way to reduce the risk of cross-contamination. All food should be covered, labelled and stored correctly, with raw foods kept below ready-to-eat items. Preventing allergen cross-contamination is just as vital; this involves storing allergenic ingredients separately, cleaning equipment thoroughly before preparing allergen-free dishes, and ensuring staff understand how allergens can be transferred unintentionally. Together, these practices help maintain a safe food environment and protect consumers from illness.

Managing allergens requires its own dedicated procedures because even microscopic traces can cause severe allergic reactions. This includes clearly identifying ingredients that contain allergens, labelling foods accurately, keeping allergen information updated, and ensuring staff understand how to prevent accidental allergen exposure. Effective communication between kitchen, service staff and consumers is vital to keep customers with allergies safe.

Cleaning and sanitising procedures

Regular cleaning schedules help prevent the build-up of dirt, bacteria and food debris. Food storage and preparation areas must be kept clean and sanitised at all times. Work surfaces, equipment and utensils should be cleaned before use, between tasks and after handling raw foods. Disposable or separate cloths for different tasks also helps prevent bacteria from spreading across surfaces.

Cleaning and sanitising are essential procedures in any kitchen to ensure food is prepared and cooked safely.

Chef wiping down kitchen surfaces

Cleaning refers to the physical removal of food debris, grease and dirt from surfaces, equipment and utensils. This step is important because visible dirt can protect bacteria and prevent sanitising products from working properly. When a work surface is cleaned after preparing raw meat, chopping vegetables or handling sticky ingredients (for example, sauces or marinades), the removal of residue reduces the conditions that allow bacteria to survive and multiply. Effective cleaning lays the foundation for proper sanitising.

Sanitising, sometimes called disinfecting, involves applying heat or chemicals to a clean surface to reduce bacteria to a safe level. This process only works effectively once all visible dirt has been removed. In a kitchen environment, sanitising helps protect food from contamination during preparation and cooking. For example, after cutting raw chicken on a chopping board, the board must be cleaned to remove juices and food residue. Then it must be sanitised to kill any remaining bacteria before it is used again for preparing ready-to-eat ingredients such as salad vegetables or cooked meats.

The cleaning and sanitising process usually follows a **structured two-stage approach**.

1. **Stage 1:** Firstly, surfaces, knives or equipment are cleaned with hot water and detergent to remove food debris and grease. Once the area is visibly clean, it is rinsed to remove detergent.
2. **Stage 2:** The second stage involves applying a sanitiser and allowing it to remain on the surface for the correct amount of time to ensure bacteria are effectively reduced. This method means that both dirt and harmful microorganisms are removed before food is prepared or cooked on that surface again.

In busy kitchens where multiple dishes are being prepared (for example, moving from preparing raw fish to assembling cooked pasta dishes), this two-stage process reduces the risk of cross-contamination.

Cleaning and sanitising are especially important during high-risk activities. When preparing raw meats, seafood, dairy desserts or foods that will not be cooked further, the risk of contamination is higher. Work areas used for raw preparation must be cleaned and sanitised before switching tasks, particularly when moving on to cooking or handling ready-to-eat foods.

Equipment such as mixers, slicers and blenders must also be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised after making raw doughs, meat mixtures or sauces before being used again for cooked or chilled foods. Damaged or hard to clean equipment can harbour bacteria; they must, therefore, be checked regularly.

A food service worker cleaning the glass of a food display cabinet with a cloth

Cleaning chemicals must be used safely and correctly in kitchen environments. Staff should:

- follow the manufacturer's instructions
- use the correct dilution levels
- allow the right contact time for sanitisers to work effectively.

Incorrect use of chemicals may leave surfaces unsafe or chemically contaminated. When preparing and cooking food, ensuring that cleaning chemicals are stored away from ingredients and only used on properly cleaned surfaces is vital. Handling chemicals safely also prevents risks to both food and staff.

Cleaning and sanitising procedures support safe food preparation and cooking by reducing harmful bacteria, preventing contamination and maintaining high hygiene standards. These processes help ensure that every stage of food production, from handling raw ingredients to serving cooked dishes, is carried out in a safe environment.

Acknowledgements

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