MEANS AND METHOD TO PROTECT ITEMS FROM CONTAMINATION

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ABSTRACT

A protective sleeve used to cover and isolate tools such as cooking utensils, medical tools, industrial tools and the like from contaminants. The sleeve comprises an interior portion, an exterior portion, and an exterior trim and is comprised of a malleable material so that it may be crimped and secured to the end of any utensil or tool. The sleeve, being malleable, may also be shaped to supplement the utensil or tool. For example, a sleeve over a spatula could be shaped with lipped edges so as to allow the spatula to more easily hold and maneuver foods. An example of a use of the protective sleeve is to protect foods from cross-contamination of harmful bacteria that may be present on raw or undercooked meats.
MEANS AND METHOD TO PROTECT ITEMS FROM CONTAMINATION

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] Human consumption of raw or undercooked meat can cause serious illness. Escherichia coli (E. coli), cholera, intestinal worms, and various forms of food poisoning are just some of the risks. When preparing food, one must use caution and cleanliness to ensure healthiness.

[0002] Meats, red or white, are often cooked over an open flame, such as on a grill. Also, the preparation of meats for cooking often involves marinating and seasoning of the meats. Various tools are used to accomplish these tasks. Spatulas, tongs, elongated forks and similar utensils are used to move the meat from one place to another, such as from a bowl or plate onto a grill. A utensil must also be used to rotate and maneuver the meat as it is cooked. During all of these actions, while the meat is still raw or undercooked, the utensils may become contaminated with potential bacteria and diseases that may be harmful to humans. Once the meat is cooked, these same utensils will cross-contaminate the meat when transferring it from the grill to a plate. A solution to this problem would be to continually wash the utensils after every contact with raw or undercooked meat. However, this solution is cumbersome and results in extra wear and tear on the utensil.

[0003] An additional problem that exists, whether using a utensil to move uncooked food or to maneuver or rotate food while it is cooking, is the inability to control the food with the utensil. A spatula may work well for some situations, but because of its rigid and flat design it may be difficult to keep the food from falling when transferring the food to a plate. A surface that may be adapted to fit the situation is needed.

[0004] The present invention is a protective sleeve that may be used as a cover on a multitude of cooking utensils. The main purpose of the protective sleeve is to protect utensils from cross-contamination of harmful bacteria that may be present on raw or undercooked meats. The present invention provides the user with a quick and easy way to cover, use, and remove the sleeve while keeping the cooking utensil clean. The protective sleeve may be disposable or washable. By foregoing the need to continually wash the utensil itself after every contact with the raw or undercooked meat, the life of the utensil is prolonged because of the reduction in ordinary wear and tear associated with washing. The present invention is also malleable so that it can be used with any utensil to create a lipped or contoured surface that allows for easier control and handling of foods with the utensil.

[0005] It will be understood by those skilled in the art that the invention as disclosed below is merely illustrative and that there are other embodiments that are not described herein that still fall within the scope and intent of the present invention. In particular, it will be obvious to one skilled in the art that although the invention as disclosed herein is used as a cover for various cooking utensils, such as tongs or a spatula, the invention could also be used in the medical field or industrial field as a means of keeping any tool from cross-contaminating other tools, materials, or people.

[0006] It will also be understood by those skilled in the art that the protective sleeve may be formed of a reusable material, so that after use the protective sleeve may be removed and washed prior to the next use.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

[0007] The present invention is a protective sleeve. It comprises of an interior portion, an exterior portion, and an exterior trim. The sleeve is designed to cover the ends of tools such as cooking utensils, medical tools, industrial tools and the like. It will be understood, however, that the group of tools for which this invention may be utilized is broad, and in general includes any tool which is used to manipulate a product where there is a desire to avoid contamination of either the product itself, the tool, and/or other materials or products. The sleeve is made of a malleable material, such as thin aluminum, so as to allow for it to be crimped to the shape of a cooking utensil, medical tool, industrial tool or the like. The sleeve protects the utensil or tool from contamination, such as when a pair of tongs or spatula comes into contact with raw or undercooked meats. When such contact occurs, only the exterior portion of the sleeve will be potentially contaminated. After use, or when the potential for contamination has passed (i.e. the meat is cooked sufficiently), the sleeve is discarded and the utensil can be used on the meat without any threat of cross-contamination. For example, there is a risk of contaminating meat that has been cooked, such as chicken, with material collected on a utensil used on the meat prior to cooking. By using the present invention during manipulation of uncooked meat and then disposing of the protective sleeve, contamination of the final cooked product can be avoided altogether.

[0008] The exterior trim on the sleeve helps the sleeve to maintain its shape, especially during packaging and storage (i.e. in a cabinet, drawer, etc.). Because of the low costs of manufacturing and producing of a protective sleeve, the sleeves may be sold in large quantities and will be readily affordable and available to all consumers.

[0009] The protective sleeve is preferably made of a malleable material, with the malleable material chosen from a group of readily-available and inexpensive malleable materials, such as aluminum foil. However, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that other malleable materials, such as malleable plastics, may be utilized without deviating from the scope and intent of the present invention.

[0010] Using a malleable material allows the sleeve to not only take the shape of the utensil or tool it is protecting, but also to be formed into a more desirable shape for the task at hand. For example, a person often uses a spatula to flip and maneuver meats on a grill. When the meats are raw and soft, a person may have difficulty handling the meat with a flat spatula. The malleable sleeve can be adjusted to form a lip or other contour to allow the spatula to more effectively control and maneuver the meats on the grill. This concept can be applied to various cooking utensils, medical tools, industrial tools and the like to better perform various tasks.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 shows two protective sleeves before being placed on the end of a pair of cooking tong.

[0012] FIG. 2 shows two protective sleeves in accordance with the present invention, one crimped onto one end of a tong.

[0013] FIG. 3 shows an example of a common spatula to which the present invention may be attached.

[0014] FIG. 4 shows a protective sleeve in accordance with the present invention being placed over the end of a spatula.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0015] Referring now to FIG. 1, a protective sleeve comprises a hollow interior portion 101 that may cover the end of a pair of tongs 104. The interior portion 101 and exterior portion 102 are comprised of a malleable material, such as
thin aluminum, so to allow the protective sleeve to be crimped and formed to the shape of a tool, such as a cooking utensil, medical tool, industrial tool or the like. The exterior portion 102 is in contact with contaminates (such as raw or undercooked meats) and thus protects the utensil or tool from being contaminated. After use, the protective sleeve is easily removed and another is placed on the utensil or tool when contact with contaminated materials (i.e., raw or undercook meats) resumes. In this manner, the protective sleeve prevents the utensil or tool from cross-contamination of the food or materials being handled (i.e., when the meat has become cooked and free of harmful substances). The protective sleeve further comprises an outer trim 103, which is more rigid and firm than the interior portion 101 and the exterior portion 102, though still malleable, and holds the inner portion 101 and exterior portion 102 together. The outer trim 103 helps to keep the desired shape of the protective sleeve. The protective sleeve may be disposable, or may be washable and reusuable.

1016 Referring now to FIG. 2, a protective sleeve is shown crimped to one tong on a pair of tongs 104.

1017 Referring now to FIG. 4, the end of a spatula 301 as shown in FIG. 3 is being covered by a protective sleeve. The protective sleeve is crimped to form to the shape of the spatula, so as to allow the spatula to continue to function while also keeping the spatula from being contaminated by raw or undercooked meats. The arrows 401 in FIG. 4 suggest a twisting motion to secure the top of the protective sleeve to the spatula handle 302. The protective sleeve can also be formed and contoured, as the task at hand demands, so as to allow for the end of the spatula 301 to function more efficiently.

1018 The invention herein has been described in a manner that is illustrative only, and it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that there are modifications and alterations to the present invention that will not deviate from the scope and spirit of the invention as disclosed herein.

1 claim:

1. A protective sleeve comprising:
a hollow interior portion to enclose and protect the end of a tool;
an exterior portion forming to the end of a tool; and

an exterior trim that outlines around the sealed portion of the protective sleeve so as to maintain the shape of the sleeve.

2. The invention of claim 1, wherein the said protective sleeve is sealed on three sides and open on one side, the open side comprising an opening that will allow the end of a tool to fit inside of the said interior portion.

3. The invention of claim 1, wherein the said protective sleeve is comprised of a malleable material, so as to allow the said protective sleeve to be crimped and formed to the shape of the end of the said tool.

4. The invention of claim 1, wherein said tool is selected from a group comprising cooking utensils, medical tools, and industrial tools.

5. The invention of claim 3 wherein said malleable material is aluminum.

6. A method of providing a protective covering for tools, said method comprising the steps of:
   selecting a malleable material; and
   forming said malleable material over the working end of said tool.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said malleable material is disposed of after use.

8. The method of claim 6, wherein said malleable material is selected from a group comprising malleable metals.

9. The method of claim 6, wherein said malleable material is selected from a group comprising malleable plastics.

10. The method of claim 6, wherein said tool is selected from a group comprising cooking utensils, medical tools, and industrial tools.

11. A method of providing a protective covering for tools, said method comprising the steps of:
   selecting a malleable material from a group comprising malleable metals;
   selecting a tool from the group comprising cooking utensils, medical tools, and industrial tools; and
   forming said malleable material over the working end of said selected tool.

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