

Don't let food make you sick! For those at increased risk for food-borne illness *

Helpful tools to keep food safe

- ▶ Meat and refrigerator thermometers, insulated shopping/cooler bags,
- ▶ Cooler packs (to keep portable food cold);
- ▶ Disposable cutting sheets
- ▶ Paper towels

Fruits & Vegetables

Contrary to common belief, those with impaired immune systems do not need to avoid all raw fruits and vegetables. But they should make sure that all the food they eat is as clean as possible. Here's how:

- ▶ **Wash** produce right before eating it. It spoils faster if you wash it before storing.
- ▶ **Rinse** and rub all surfaces clean under running water. (*Do not use soap on food*).
- ▶ **Scrub** firm produce surfaces (such as melon rinds) with vegetable brushes before cutting.
- ▶ **Reject** any food with mold on it. Cutting out a moldy spot is not good enough.
- ▶ **Reject** any food with an "off" odor or bruised, wilted or discolored surfaces.
- ▶ **If you can't wash it well (as with raspberries) -- don't eat it!**

- ▶ **Do not drink "raw", unpasteurized juices.**

- ▶ **Do not eat raw bean/seed sprouts.** The seeds are often contaminated, so rinsing isn't enough.

- ▶ The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) says that measures are in place to reduce the risk of food-borne-illness recently seen in bagged, raw produce. Keep these products refrigerated at 40°F, and refrigerate pre-cut or peeled produce within 2 hours of purchasing. Pre-washed, bagged produce does not need to be washed again, but you may wash it just before using, as an extra safety measure.

Meat/Fish/Poultry

- ▶ **Don't eat raw or undercooked fish, shellfish, meat, or poultry, even in small amounts.** This includes cold smoked fish/lox, raw fish sushi, and rare meat. Order well-done meat (with no pink showing).

Luncheon meats

- ▶ Although the risk of getting sick from luncheon meats is low, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that those at increased risk reheat these foods until steaming hot (and then let cool) before eating them.

* People at increased risk of food-borne illness include: patients receiving chemotherapy or immunosuppressant drugs; those with impaired immunity (such as HIV/AIDS), the elderly, infants, and pregnant womrn.

Eggs, milk, cheese

▶ Eggs

Cook all eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Avoid eggs “over easy” and any food which contains raw eggs (home-made ice creams, raw cookie dough, or home-made Caesar salad dressing).

▶ Low-cholesterol egg products

Foods such as Eggbeaters or Simply Whites may be used raw (i.e., for eggnog), since they are pasteurized.

▶ Milk

All milk, yogurt, cheese, or milk-based food must be pasteurized, not “raw”.

▶ Cheese

Do not eat cheeses with foods like chili peppers added to them, or unpasteurized, ripened soft cheeses such as brie, Mexican soft cheese (queso blanco fresco), feta, or blue cheese. These cheeses often have unacceptable levels of bacteria. (Baking these risky cheeses to 145 ° kills most harmful bacteria, making them safe to eat). You can eat commercially packaged, refrigerated cheeses such as American, mozzarella, Jack, Swiss, and mild and medium cheddar and pasteurized cheese spreads.

Miscellaneous Foods

▶ Avoid raw or unpasteurized honey

(it may contain harmful soil bacteria related to botulism).

▶ Don't use bulk leaf herbs and teas which may contain non-food contaminants (dirt, insects).

▶ Avoid “home style” cheese dressings which are not shelf-stable

(require refrigeration).

▶ Do not eat uncooked tofu, miso, tempeh, or raw brewer's yeast.

Bring miso to a boil. Boil tofu for 5 minutes.

Shopping tips

- ▶ Place raw meat, fish or poultry into separate plastic bags before placing them in your cart.
- ▶ Select frozen foods and meats last, just before checking out. Use insulated cooler bags or cool packs.
- ▶ Especially in hot weather, use coolers, etc., to keep food cold on the way home.

Preparing Food Safely

▶ If you question the safety of your well water, have it tested.

- ▶ **Keep everything that touches food clean.** Wash your hands well before and after handling each food. Use soap and rub hands vigorously for 20 seconds under running, warm water. Use hot, soapy water throughout meal preparation - to wash dishes, cooking utensils, knives, cutting boards, and counters. Dishrags and sponges can harbor dangerous bacteria. Use clean paper towels and sanitizing cleansers to wipe down surfaces.

Storing Food

- ▶ **Keep** uncooked meats, fish, poultry and their juices away from other foods.
- ▶ **Use** a refrigerator thermometer to ensure that the freezer is at 0°F or below, the refrigerator 35°F to 41°F.

- ▶ **Never** leave perishable foods out of the refrigerator for over 2 hours.
- ▶ **Refrigerate or freeze** leftovers immediately, well-covered. Use refrigerated leftovers within 2 to 3 days.
- ▶ **Use** fresh fish, poultry, and ground meat within 1 to 2 days of purchase.
- ▶ **Use** other meats (larger, un-sliced, un-ground cuts, such as roasts) within 3 days. Freeze them if you won't be cooking them within these time frames.
- ▶ **Check** the expiration dates on your food before you eat it.

Thawing Food Safely

- ▶ **Thaw frozen foods** in the refrigerator, under cold running water (less than 70° F), or in a microwave oven set to defrost. Cook them right after thawing.
- ▶ **Never thaw foods at room temperature!**
- ▶ **Do not refreeze thawed foods** (unless they have been cooked). Freezing creates icicles in the food, breaking down cell walls, which makes the food more vulnerable to contamination.

Cooking Food Safely

- ▶ Cook meats, fish and poultry to the well-done stage. Verify with a meat thermometer: 165°F for poultry; 155°F for ground meats; 145°F for roasts, fish and steaks. Cook fish until it is opaque and flakes easily.

- ▶ Meat juices should run clear when the meat is pierced. Left-over foods or ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs should be thoroughly reheated (no cold spots) until steaming (165°F).

Eating Out?

- ▶ **While your white cell counts are low, the safest food for you is what you make, not what you eat out.** Restaurants should follow standard food preparation guidelines, but illness has been traced to improperly handled soft-serve ice creams, luncheon meats, salads, improperly washed fruits and vegetables, and undercooked meats.
- ▶ **Eating at friends' homes is actually a common cause of food-borne-illness.** Educate others about your need for carefully prepared foods before accepting social engagements that include food.
- ▶ Food served piping hot is the safest.

Internet resources for food-borne illness

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/food-born.html>

<http://www.fightbac.org/main.cfm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety>

Questions?

Your medical team can contact your dietitian, or call **800-849-7048**.

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