People at Risk of Food Poisoning

Food poisoning or foodborne illness can affect anyone who eats food contaminated by bacteria, viruses, parasites, toxins, or other substances, but certain people are more likely to get sick or to have a serious illness.

Know whether you're in a group of people who are more likely to get food poisoning, and make safer choices to reduce your risk for foodborne illness.

People at risk include:

- Adults age 65 and older
- Children younger than 5 years
- People whose immune systems are weakened due to illness or medical treatment
- Pregnant women

If you or someone you care for are included in one of these groups, follow our four basic steps to food safety and the additional tips included below.

Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often.

Separate: Separate raw meat and poultry from ready-to-eat food.

Cook: Cook food to the right temperature.

Chill: Chill raw meat and poultry, as well as cooked leftovers, promptly (within 2 hours).

Reduce Your Risk of Foodborne Illness

Select Safer Alternatives to High Risk Foods

Type of Food	High Risk	Lower Risk
Meat and Poultry	Raw or undercooked meat or poultry	Meat or poultry cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature
Seafood	• Any raw or undercooked fish, or shellfish, or food containing raw or undercooked seafood (e.g., sashimi, sushi, or ceviche)	• Previously cooked seafood heated to 165°F (74°C) • Canned fish and seafood • Seafood cooked to 145°F (63°C)

Type of Food	High Risk	Lower Risk
	• Cold smoked fish or products containing cold smoked fish	• Fish, Smoked fish and seafood casserole heated to 165°F (74°C)
Milk	• Unpasteurized (raw) milk	• Pasteurized milk
Eggs	Foods that contain raw/undercooked eggs, such as: • Homemade Caesar salad dressings • Homemade raw cookie dough • Homemade eggnog • Homemade mayonnaise	Use pasteurized eggs/egg products when preparing recipes that call for raw or undercooked eggs
Sprouts	Raw sprouts (alfalfa, bean, or any other sprout)	Cooked sprouts
Vegetables	Unwashed fresh vegetables, including lettuce/salads	• Washed fresh vegetables, including salads • Cooked vegetables
Cheese	• Any type of cheese when made with (raw) unpasteurized milk • Any unheated queso fresco-type cheeses, when made with pasteurized or unpasteurized (raw) milk, or similar fresh, soft cheeses such as queso blanco and requesón	• Hard cheeses, when made with pasteurized milk, such as Asiago, Cheddar, Parmesan, or Swiss/Gruyere/Emmental • Cottage cheese, cream cheese, string cheese, feta, and mozzarella, when made with pasteurized milk • Heated queso fresco-type cheeses or heated unpasteurized (raw) milk cheeses, when heated to 165°F or steaming hot
Hot Dogs and Deli Meats	Hot dogs, deli and luncheon meats that have not been reheated	Reheat hot dogs, luncheon meats, and deli meats to steaming hot or 165°F (74°C)
Pâtés	Unpasteurized and/or refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads	Canned or shelf-stable pâtés or meat spreads

Shop Safely

- Do not buy or use damaged, swollen, rusted, or dented cans.
- Choose unbruised fruits and vegetables.
- Do not buy or use cracked or unrefrigerated eggs.
- Pick up frozen and refrigerated items just before you check out at the grocery store.
- Refrigerate groceries right away, and never leave perishable foods out for more than 2 hours.
- Put raw packaged meat, poultry, or seafood into a plastic bag before placing it in the shopping cart, so that its juices will not drip on and contaminate other foods.

Order Safely When Dining Out

- Ask whether the food contains raw or undercooked ingredients such as eggs, sprouts, meat, poultry, or seafood. If so, choose something else.
- Ask how these foods have been cooked. If the server does not know the answer, ask to speak to the chef to be sure your food has been cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature.
- If you plan to save leftovers to eat later, refrigerate perishable foods as soon as possible – and always within 2 hours after purchase or delivery. If the leftover is in air temperatures above 90°F (32°C), refrigerate within 1 hour.
- If in doubt, make another selection. Explore more Tips for Eating at Restaurants.

Store Your Leftovers Safely

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours—1 hour if the outside temperature is above 90°F (32°C).
- Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.
- Use cooked leftovers within 4 days.
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F (74°C).
- Use our Cold Storage Chart and download our FoodKeeper application to make sure you are storing food and beverages properly, and using them within recommended storage guidelines.

Date Last Reviewed

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