



Bringing food from home

Food from home can be a thoughtful way to support a patient. However, patients are more vulnerable to foodborne illness, and it is important that food is handled safely.

Please follow these simple guidelines to reduce the risk of food poisoning.

1. Speak to the nurse

Patients may have special dietary requirements or restrictions. Check with your loved one's nurse, dietitian or speech pathologist before giving them food or drinks.

Important: Do not offer food to other patients – they may have special dietary requirements or restrictions.

2. High-risk and low-risk foods

Some foods need to be kept cold to stop bacteria growing. These are called **high-risk foods**. **Low-risk foods** are safer and can usually be stored at room temperature.

High-risk foods (need refrigeration)

- Cooked meat, chicken and seafood
- Processed meats such as ham, salami, polony and pâté
- Milk and dairy products such as cheese, yoghurt and cream
- Cooked rice and pasta
- Prepared salads and sandwiches.

Lower-risk foods (safer choices)

- Whole fresh fruit and vegetables
- Dried fruit and nuts
- Crackers, biscuits and bread
- Dry packaged snacks such as biscuits or muesli bars.

Choose low-risk foods whenever possible. If high-risk foods are brought in, please take the following precautions to reduce the risk of food poisoning.

3. Preparing food

- Before handling food, wash your hands well with soap and water and dry them thoroughly.
- While cooking, ensure utensils and the kitchen are clean.
- Keep hot food steaming hot (60 °C or above).
- Keep cold food refrigerated (between 0 °C and 5 °C).
- Separate raw and cooked/ready-to-eat food.
- **If you are sick, do not prepare food for patients.**

4. Transporting food to hospital

Cold food

- Maintain temperature under 5 °C – fridge temperature.
- Put cold food in an insulated cooler bag.
- Pack food with an ice pack and do not pack hot and cold food together.

Hot food

- Maintain temperature above 60 °C – steaming hot.
- Place in an insulated cooler bag with a hot bottle.
- If food cools below 60 °C, reheat it until steaming hot.
- Ask the nurse or catering staff about microwave facilities on the ward.

Important: Any uneaten reheated food must be thrown away.

5. Storing food

Refrigerated food

Any perishable food that is not eaten straight away must be covered and kept in the fridge.

When storing food at hospital:

- Only **small amounts** can be stored in ward fridges.
- All food **must be labelled** with the patient's name and the dates it was prepared and stored.
- Perishable food not eaten within **24 hours** may be thrown away.
- On discharge, ensure any items from the fridge are removed

Non-refrigerated food

Wrapped, non-perishable foods can be kept at room temperature, such as biscuits, chocolates, crackers and lollies.

Always check the 'Use by' or 'Best before' date on packaged commercially prepared food.

Important: Once opened, food may not last as long as the 'Use by' date on the package.

6. Reheating food

When reheating food at hospital:

- Reheat the meal until steaming hot throughout (at least 60 °C).
- Fully defrost frozen food before reheating.
- Thaw frozen food in the fridge or microwave, not at room temperature.

7. Patients with swallowing difficulties

Some patients may need texture-modified food or thickened drinks to swallow safely.

Texture-modified diets include:

- Smooth puree
- Minced and moist
- Soft and bite sized.

Important: If your loved one is on a texture-modified diet or thickened fluids, check with their speech pathologist before bringing food or drinks from home.

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