

Patient advice sheet

Food hygiene and safety

Eating should be a pleasurable experience. However, food can become contaminated with germs, which can grow to harmful levels in warm or moist conditions. To prevent food poisoning it is important to take care with your food. This is particularly important if you are at greater risk of infection.

“Use by” dates

Always check the “Use by” and “Best before” dates of foods before eating. A “Use by” date gives a date to use a perishable food by. Perishable foods include meat or fish products and ready-to-eat salads. Discard food that is past the “Use by” date, unless it has already been frozen.

Dried, frozen or tinned foods may have a “Best before” date. After this date the food may still be safe to eat, but may have changes in flavour, colour or texture. Do not eat foods which seem off.

Some supermarkets no longer use “Best before” dates on fresh fruit and vegetables, and dairy products such as milk. Use your senses to check if the food is okay to eat:

- Check for bruises or discolouration on fruits and vegetables
- Make sure potatoes don’t have sprouts or green patches
- Smell dairy products such as milk, in case it has soured
- Look out for visible mould on baked foods such as bread

Food shopping

- Try to buy chilled or frozen foods last and take them home as soon as possible.
- Pack frozen foods together and put them in the freezer as soon as you get home.
- Make sure raw meat and fish is packaged separately from other foods, to prevent contamination.
- Choose pre-packed foods at deli counters.
- Avoid buying foods with damaged or broken packaging.

Storing food at home

- Follow the storage instructions on food packaging.
- Throw away any foods not eaten by the “Use by” date, any eggs with broken shells, or any mouldy food immediately.
- Keep dairy products, meat, fish, eggs and leftover foods in the fridge.
- Place raw meat or fish in a clean, sealed container on the bottom shelf of the fridge.
- Leftover cooked food should be cooled as soon as possible and placed in the fridge within two hours. Leftover food should be eaten within two days.
- After opening a canned food, store any leftovers in a covered container in the fridge. Follow the instructions on the packaging for how long it can be stored for.
- Do not refreeze thawed food.
- Make sure your fridge temperature is between 0°C and 5°C. Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature if you are worried.
- Make sure your freezer temperature is below -18°.

Around the kitchen

- Keep your kitchen clean.
- Clean work surfaces with a disinfectant, especially where raw meat or fish were prepared.
- Wash your hands with warm soapy water and dry them thoroughly:
 - before preparing foods or eating
 - after touching raw meat or fish
 - after touching pets or the bin
 - after going to the toilet
- Wipe your hands on a separate clean towel rather than the tea towel.
- Ideally, use a dishwasher to clean kitchen utensils. Otherwise wash them in hot soapy water and rinse them before drying.
- Change your kitchen cloths daily. Wash them in a hot cycle of the washing machine.
- Keep pets away from work surfaces, dishes and surfaces.
- Cover any cuts and grazes with a waterproof plaster.

Preparing food

- Use a separate knife and chopping board for raw meat, cooked food, and salads. If you need to use the same equipment, wash it thoroughly between uses.
- Wash fruit and vegetables before eating or before chopping and cooking.
- Frozen food should be completely defrosted before cooking. Defrost foods in the fridge, in a container that prevents dripping onto other foods. Foods can also be defrosted using a microwave.
- Follow the recommended cooking instructions on food labels or in recipes.
- Preheat the oven to ensure that food is cooked at the recommended temperature. Refer to manufacturer's instructions if using microwaves to heat prepared foods.
- Ensure food is piping hot before serving. Check that the centre is also cooked.
- Meat should be cooked until the juices are clear.
- Do not reheat food more than once.

Eating out

- Check a restaurant's Food Hygiene Rating. This can be found on your health department's website or on display at the restaurant. A score of 5 is the best.
- Cold food should be served cold, and hot food should be served hot.
- If a restaurant serves you undercooked food, send it back to be cooked again.
- Avoid food from salad bars, market stalls and ice cream vendors.



Water safety

- Water coolers can be a source of infection. Have freshly run tap water or bottled water instead. Look for advice if travelling abroad.
- Avoid ice when away from home (such as in restaurants). Have ice made from freshly run tap water.

Food poisoning

Common symptoms of food poisoning include stomach-ache, fever, vomiting and diarrhoea. If you do get food poisoning, drink plenty of fluids and have lots of rest. If your symptoms are severe or persistent, see your GP. Do not prepare or serve food for other people if you have food poisoning.

Extra care advice for people at greater risk of food poisoning

People who are at greater risk from food poisoning need to take extra care with certain foods. These groups of people include:

- Babies and toddlers younger than 5
- Older adults, aged 65 and over
- Pregnant women
- People with a suppressed immune system because of illness or medical treatment, for example, if you are having chemotherapy.

Some foods are more likely to contain harmful bacteria. If you are at greater risk of infection, please follow the extra care advice for eggs, fish, meat and milk products.

Eggs

- Only buy fresh eggs with the lion marking.
- Eggs should be thoroughly cooked until both the yolk and white are solid.
- Do not eat uncooked foods made using raw egg, such as homemade Hollandaise sauce, mayonnaise, ice cream, souffle, and frothy cocktail drinks.
- Most packaged foods in the shops, such as mayonnaise or ice-cream, are made with pasteurised egg. These should be safe to eat.

Fish and shellfish

- Do not eat raw, smoked, or partially cooked fish and shellfish (such as sushi, oysters, caviar, smoked salmon)
- Smoked fish products which have already been heat-treated, such as tinned smoked fish, do not require further cooking.

Smoked fish

- The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) recently found that smoked fish is associated with a type of food poisoning called invasive listeriosis, which can cause serious illness for people who have reduced immune system function.
- Make sure that ready-to-eat smoked fish is thoroughly cooked before being eaten.

Meat and meat products

- Avoid pâté, including vegetable versions.
- Avoid dishes containing raw meat, such as steak tartare or Carpaccio.
- Do not eat smoked meats which have not been cooked, such as salami.

Milk and dairy products

- Do not consume raw dairy products, such as unpasteurized milk, cream or yogurt.
- Avoid soft cheeses made with unpasteurised milk (such as feta, brie, parmesan, paneer, labhar) or mould-ripened cheeses (such as Brie, Camembert, Chevre, goat's cheese, Stilton or Danish blue).
- Choose hard cheeses (such as Cheddar, Red Leicester, Cheshire), or try cottage cheese, processed cheese and spreads.

Reheated rice

- If possible, eat rice as soon as it has been cooked.
- Leftover cooked rice should be cooled down within 1 hour and stored in the fridge.
- Do not keep leftover rice for more than 1 day.
- Make sure reheated rice is steaming hot all the way through before eating.

Probiotics

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts which are supposed to have health benefits. They are usually added to 'live' foods such as yoghurts (e.g. Actimel, ProViva or Yakult) or taken as food supplements. Probiotic foods are considered safe to eat for people with normal immune system function.

Some research suggests probiotics could help manage side effects caused by cancer treatments, however more research is needed to see whether probiotics are safe for people who are at greater risk of infection. It is recommended that you talk to your doctor before taking any probiotic food or supplement.

Further information

- **Food Standards Agency – Food Safety**
<https://www.food.gov.uk/food-safety>
- **Food Standards Agency – Home Food Fact Checker**
<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/home-food-fact-checker>
- **NHS – Eat Well -** <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

**Credit - Dietetic Department, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS*

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, in large print or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net