



Food Safety for Seniors

Participant Handout

It's estimated that there are 76 million cases of foodborne illness in the U.S. every year; 325,000 require hospitalization; 5,000 result in death. Older adults can experience more serious foodborne illness complications that require hospitalization and can result in long-term disability and even death. Although frail elderly (such as nursing home residents) may be most at risk, even older adults in relatively good health can be more susceptible to foodborne illness. As we age, our immune system weakens.

Although many seniors have a lifetime of experience preparing food, some of their longtime food handling practices may no longer guarantee food safety. A lot has changed over the years that has food safety implications. For example, bacteria have mutated and become more harmful, much of our produce is now produced in centralized areas of the U.S. or imported, and more food is now ready-to-eat – which makes safe food handling even more critical.

Bacteria (such as Salmonella and E. coli O157:H7) are responsible for a large share of outbreaks. Viruses (such as Norovirus) also contribute. Parasites and chemicals/toxins cause a smaller portion of outbreaks.

The symptoms and duration of foodborne illness vary depending on the type of microorganism, the amount of contaminated food eaten, and the susceptibility of the person. Nausea/vomiting and diarrhea are common symptoms. Symptoms rarely strike immediately after eating a contaminated food. There is usually a lag of several hours, but sometimes it can be days before they appear.

Risky Foods Checklist

Several foods are more frequently linked to foodborne illness outbreaks. Put a check mark in front of those that you always or sometimes eat or drink:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Unpasteurized milk and milk products (such as raw milk cheese)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raw or undercooked meats and poultry (such as rare ground beef)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unpasteurized fruit juice (such as fresh-pressed apple juice)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raw sprouts of all types (such as alfalfa sprouts)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raw seafood and fish (such as oysters)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raw or undercooked eggs (such as soft boiled or sunny-side-up eggs)

Raw vegetables such as leafy greens have also emerged as a food safety concern.

Bacteria live in the intestinal tracts of animals, so they can be naturally associated with products of animal origin (meat, poultry, eggs, milk). Thorough cooking/heating kills the bacteria.

Sometimes bacteria accidentally cross-contaminate foods that won't be cooked before eating, however (such as salad greens in contact with raw meat juice).

Making wise food choices

Seniors can lower their foodborne illness risk by making wise food choices – both at home and away from home. Which of the higher risk choices do you always or sometimes eat?

Type of food	Higher risk choices	Lower risk choices
Meat/poultry	Raw or undercooked meat or poultry	Meat or poultry cooked to a safe internal temperature
Hot dogs/deli meats	Hot dogs, deli meats, and luncheon meats that have not been reheated	Hot dogs, luncheon meats, and deli meats reheated to steaming hot (165°)*
Seafood	Raw or undercooked fish (such as sushi or ceviche) Raw oysters Cold-smoked fish Precooked seafood (such as shrimp and crab)	Seafood cooked to 145° Smoked fish and precooked seafood heated to 165° * Canned fish and seafood
Milk	Raw/unpasteurized milk	Pasteurized milk
Cheese	Soft cheeses, if made from unpasteurized milk such as feta, camembert, Brie, Blue-veined, queso fresco	Hard cheese such as cheddar Processed cheese Cream cheese Soft cheese made from pasteurized milk
Eggs	Raw/undercooked eggs including foods containing them - such as Caesar salad dressing, homemade raw cookie dough, homemade eggnog	Pasteurized eggs/egg products used in recipes calling for raw or undercooked eggs. Hard cooked and over-medium eggs.
Sprouts	Raw sprouts (such as alfalfa)	Cooked sprouts (such as bean)
Vegetables	Unwashed fresh vegetables (including lettuce and salads)	Washed fresh vegetables Cooked, canned, or frozen vegetables
Fruit juices	Unpasteurized juice (such as apple)	Pasteurized juice

Adapted from USDA, Food Safety for Older Adults

*Hot dogs/deli meats/luncheon meats and precooked seafood (crab, shrimp) should be heated to kill Listeria bacteria that could contaminate the food after processing. Listeria-caused foodborne illness is more serious for older adults.

Instead of buying sliced meat at the deli, it's wise for older adults to cook a small ham, beef roast or turkey breast and slice as needed. Keep refrigerated or freeze for longer term storage. Because there are safeguards against bacterial contamination in manufacturing plants, sliced meat and poultry that is commercially packaged is a safer choice.

Preventing Foodborne Illness

Sometimes foodborne illness results from poor food handling at home. How often do you follow these three simple food handling rules: Keep it Clean; Cook it Well; Cool it Soon?

Food Handling Practices Rating

Food handling practice	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	1	2	3	4
Keep it clean				
Wash your hands with soap and water before handling food.				
Wash counters, cutting boards, and utensils after handling raw meat/poultry.				
Wash fruits/vegetables before preparing or eating them.				
Cook it well				
Use a thermometer to check the temperature of cooked meat/poultry.				
Re-heat hot dogs, luncheon meat and deli meat to steaming before eating.				
Re-heat pre-cooked seafood before eating.				
Cool it soon				
Refrigerate perishable leftovers within 2 to 3 hours.				
Keep hot food (above 140°); keep cold food (below 40°).				
Speed cooling of large quantities of hot food.				

Keep it Clean!

Good hygiene keeps the number of bacteria low. You should always wash your hands before handling food and after using the bathroom, smoking, touching your nose, mouth, hair or skin, handling dirty plates, utensils or garbage, petting a dog or cat.

Don't spread bacteria from raw meat, poultry, fish and eggs to foods that won't be cooked before eating (such as salads). Clean all work areas with soap and water.

Cook it Well!

Thorough cooking kills harmful bacteria. Thermometers are the best way to accurately check the temperature of food to ensure that it's been thoroughly cooked.

Cooked foods should reach these temperatures for safety:

Recommended temperature	Food(s)
145°	Seafood Beef steaks and roasts
160°	Ground meat Egg dishes Pork
165°	Poultry Hot dogs/deli meats Leftovers

Use an instant read thermometer to check food temperatures before eating.

Cool it Soon!

Bacteria grow fast when perishable food is in the dangerous temperature zone (40° to 140°). Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.

Don't leave moist, protein-rich foods (like cooked meat, casseroles, vegetables, pasta and potato salads) at room temperature longer than 2 to 3 hours.

Refrigerate foods properly to help prevent foodborne illness. Consumers are advised to clean refrigerators regularly, use a refrigerator thermometer, and keep refrigerator temperature at 40° or below. At higher temperatures food will spoil more quickly – and could become unsafe to eat.

Refrigerator Food Safety Activity

Myrtle Jones needs to clean out her over-flowing refrigerator. She has to make decisions about the safety/quality of her stored food. Should she keep or discard these foods?:

Safe	Unsafe	Refrigerated food
		1 Turkey leftovers that sat on the table all afternoon after a family gathering.
		2 Leftover hard-cooked eggs that were carried in a picnic basket on a warm summer day.
		3 A box of frozen spinach that was thawed in the refrigerator two days ago but not yet used.
		4 A big pot of homemade vegetable soup that has been in the refrigerator for 3-4 days.
		5 A doggy bag of lasagna left over from a restaurant meal eaten yesterday.

Although it may be tempting to avoid wasting questionable food, your health may depend on how you handle it. If in doubt, throw it out – especially if you do see signs of spoilage such as mold.

Federal Food safety regulation

Fifteen federal agencies collectively administer at least 30 laws related to food safety. The primary agencies that inspect and regulate food are the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of USDA regulates the safety, wholesomeness, and proper labeling of most domestic and imported meat and poultry and their products sold for human consumption. (FDA shares the responsibility for egg safety with FSIS.)

FSIS is responsible for certifying that foreign meat and poultry plants are operating under an inspection system equivalent to the U.S. system before they can export their product to the U.S. FSIS inspectors located at U.S. ports of entry carry out a statistical sampling program to verify the safety of imported meats and poultry before they are released into domestic commerce.

FDA is responsible for ensuring that all domestic and imported food products – except for most meats & poultry – are safe, nutritious, wholesome, and accurately labeled. Examples of FDA-regulated food are produce, dairy products, seafood, and processed foods.

FDA conducts targeted inspection of food imports based on the past history of the product. For example, presence of filth, pesticide residues or bacterial contamination might be assessed in addition in accuracy of labeling.

Food safety regulation in Oregon

The Food Safety division of the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) is responsible for monitoring the safety of foods sold in grocery stores, convenience stores, domestic kitchens, bakeries, meat markets and food processing plants. ODA also has jurisdiction over dairy farms and milk processing plants as well as shellfish harvesting. Some of their inspections are done on behalf of FDA. They have a statewide network of food sanitarians that do these food establishment inspections.

The Foodborne Illness Prevention Program of the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for monitoring the safety of food sold in restaurants. They oversee a statewide network of Environmental Health Specialists that do food facility inspections in the counties. Both ODA and DHS use the FDA Food Code as their source of food regulations.

Reporting foodborne illness

If you suspect that you have foodborne illness, follow these steps:

- Consult your physician or healthcare provider to seek medical treatment as appropriate
- Preserve the questionable food. If a portion of the suspect food is available, put it in freezer packaging labeled with the word “danger” and freeze it.
- Save all of the packaging such as cans or cartons. Write down the type of food, date and time consumed, and when the onset of symptoms occurred. Save any identical unopened packages.
- Call your county health department if you believe you became ill from food you ate in a restaurant or other food establishment. Call, too, if you suspect that a food bought at a grocery store made you sick.

Food Safety Tips

- ▶ When shopping, pick up perishable food last and then head home and refrigerate it soon – especially in hot weather.
- ▶ Follow manufacturers' instructions for heating frozen entrees. Check to see if your microwave has the specified wattage.
- ▶ When grilling outdoors, always use a clean plate for the cooked meat.
- ▶ Keep a supply of dish cloths and launder them frequently. The heat of a drier kills bacteria.
- ▶ Use paper towels to clean up raw meat and poultry juice.
- ▶ Fill a spray bottle with diluted chlorine bleach (1 teaspoon per quart of water) and use it to sanitize surfaces (such as cutting boards).
- ▶ Sanitize wet sponges by heating them for 1 minute on high in the microwave.
- ▶ Use the heated drying cycle of the dishwasher to increase the destruction of bacteria.

For more information:

To Your Health!– Food Safety for Seniors (FDA/USDA)

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~acrobat/sr2.pdf>

Seniors and Food Safety

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/seniorsa.html> (FDA)

Food Safety for Older Adults (FSIS/USDA)

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Food_Safety_for_Older_Adults_Text.pdf

You Can Prevent Foodborne Illness (PNW 250 – Pacific Northwest Extension Services)

<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/pnw0250/pnw0250.pdf>

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