

Food Safety Tips for Seniors: What to Keep, What to Toss

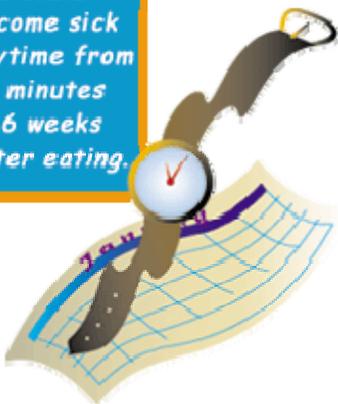
A lot has changed over your lifetime -- including the way food is produced and distributed. It used to be that food was produced close to where people lived. Many people shopped daily, and prepared and ate their food at home. Eating in restaurants was saved for special occasions. Today, food in your local grocery store comes from all over the world. And nearly 50 percent of the money we spend on food goes to buy food that others prepare, like "carry out" and restaurant meals.

Another thing that has changed is our awareness and knowledge of illnesses that can be caused by harmful bacteria in food:

- Through science, we have discovered new and dangerous bacteria and viruses that can be found in food -- bacteria we didn't even know about years ago.
- Science has also helped us identify illnesses that can be caused by bacteria and viruses in food -- illnesses we didn't recognize before. Today, for instance, we realize that some illnesses, like some kinds of arthritis, can be traced to foodborne illness.

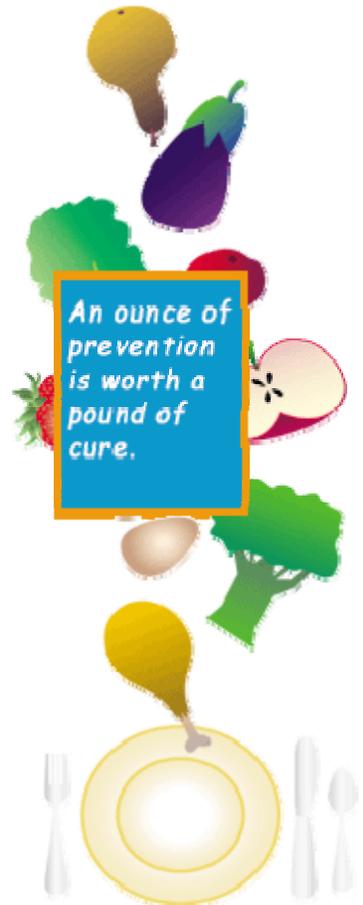
One of the other things that we know today is that some people -- including people over 65 -- can be more susceptible to getting sick from bacteria in food. But seniors who take care to handle food safely can help keep themselves healthy.

You could become sick anytime from 20 minutes to 6 weeks after eating.



It can be difficult for people to recognize when harmful bacteria in food have made them sick. For instance, it's hard to tell if food is unsafe, because you can't see, smell or taste the bacteria it may contain.

Sometimes people think their foodborne illness was caused by their last meal. In fact, there is a wide range of time between eating food with harmful bacteria and the onset of illness.



Usually foodborne bacteria take **1 to 3 days to cause illness**. But you could become sick anytime from 20 minutes to 6 weeks after eating some foods with dangerous bacteria. It depends on a variety of factors, including the type of bacteria in the food.

Sometimes foodborne illness is confused with other types of illness. If you get foodborne illness, you might be sick to your stomach, vomit, or have diarrhea. Or, symptoms could be flu-like with a fever and headache, and body aches. The best thing to do is check with your doctor. And if you become ill after eating out, also call your local health department so they can investigate.

Foodborne illness can be dangerous, but is often easy to prevent. By following the basic rules of food safety, you can help prevent foodborne illness for yourself and others. There are 4 basic food safety rules:

- **Clean: Wash Hands and Surfaces Often.** Did you know that one of the easiest ways to prevent most types of illnesses is simply to wash your hands properly? Use plenty of soap and wash hands for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- **Cook: Cook Foods to Proper Temperatures.** Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of foods that you cook. Cook steaks and roasts to at least 145°F, ground meat to 160°F, and poultry to at least 165°F. Foods cooked or reheated in a microwave oven must be bubbling and hot throughout.
- **Separate: Don't Cross Contaminate.** Keep raw foods like fruits and vegetables and ready-to-eat foods like luncheon meats safe from harmful bacteria by storing them away from raw meats in your grocery cart or refrigerator.
- **Chill: Refrigerate Foods Promptly.** Keep cold foods and leftovers in the refrigerator. Set your home refrigerator to 40°F or below and the freezer unit to 0°F or below. Follow the **2 Hour Rule**: Don't allow perishable foods to sit on the counter for more than 2 hours. This means no thawing of meat on the counter! And one special tip: Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. It won't hurt your refrigerator to put hot food like soups or stews right in the refrigerator in shallow containers for quick cooling, and it will keep you – and your food – safe!



REFRIGERATOR STORAGE CHART

Food Item	Refrigerator (40°F)
EGGS	
Fresh eggs, in shell	4-5 weeks
Hard cooked	1 week
Egg substitutes, opened	3 days
Egg substitutes, unopened	10 days*
DAIRY PRODUCTS	
Milk	1 week
Cottage cheese	1 week
Yogurt	1-2 weeks
Mayonnaise	2 months
DELI FOODS	
Entrees, cold or hot	3-4 days
Deli meats – sliced ham, turkey, beef	2-3 days
Store-prepared or homemade salads	3-5 days
HOT DOGS AND LUNCHEON MEATS	
Hot dogs, opened package	1 week
Hot dogs, unopened package	2 weeks*
Luncheon meats, opened	3-5 days
Luncheon meats, unopened	2 weeks
LEFTOVERS	
Cooked meat, meat or egg dishes, soups, stews and vegetables	3-4 days*
Gravy and meat broth	1-2 days*
Cooked fish and poultry	3-4 days*
FRESH MEAT	
Steaks or roasts	3-5 days*
Chicken or turkey, whole or pieces	1-2 days*
Fresh meat	1-2 days*
PROCESSED MEAT	
Bacon	1 week*
Canned ham (label says 'Keep Refrigerated')	6-9 months
Ham, fully cooked	3-5 days*
Sausage, raw	1-2 days*
Precooked sausage breakfast links/patties	1 week*

*Freeze for longer storage.

Fresh fruits and vegetables also require special care. Most fruits and vegetables should be stored in the refrigerator, but some, such as bananas, will retain quality for a longer period if stored on the counter. Ask your grocer how to store fruits and vegetables if you aren't sure.

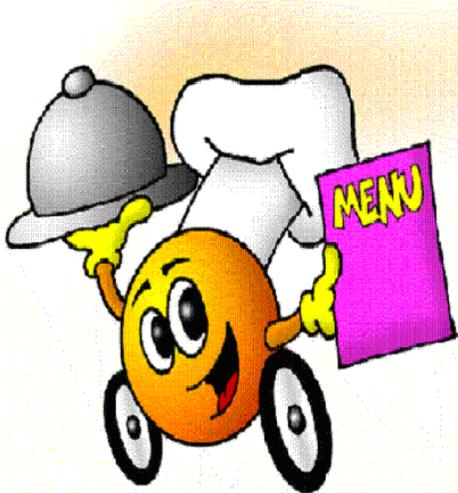


All produce purchased pre-cut or peel should be refrigerated for safety as well as quality. Pre-cut melons must be kept refrigerated; if left out for more than 2 hours they should be discarded.

Take Time to Treat Take-Out and Delivered Foods Properly!

Let's face it. Sometimes it's just easier and more enjoyable to let someone else do the cooking. Hot or cold ready-prepared meals are perishable and can cause illness when mishandled. ***Proper handling is essential to ensure the food is safe!***

HOT FOODS: Hot foods that you purchase or are delivered to your home need to be kept hot (145°F) and eaten within 2 hours. If dishes will not be eaten within **2 hours**--refrigerate the food and then reheat to **bubbling hot** when you are ready to eat. **COLD FOODS** should be eaten within 2 hours or refrigerated or frozen for eating at another time.



When **reheating food**, heat thoroughly to 165°F, until bubbling hot. If heating in a microwave oven, cover food and rotate the dish so the food heats evenly and doesn't leave 'cold spots' that could harbor bacteria.

For other questions on the safety of food, consult the University of Wisconsin Extension program office in your county.

Remember: When in Doubt, Throw it Out!

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.