



Bringing food from home patient information



Bringing in food from home is a lovely way to show a patient that you care for them. Whether it be culturally appropriate food, snacks, or their favourite family meal, this can assist the patient to increase their food intake and lift their spirits.

It is important that food brought in for patients has been prepared, transported, stored and reheated safely to prevent food poisoning. When people are in hospital their immune system is lowered and they are at a higher risk of getting food poisoning.



If you are bringing food from home 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 while they are in hospital, so it is important that you check with your patient's nurse, dietitian or speech pathologist prior to giving them food or drinks.

Important: please do not offer or share food with other patients, as they may have special dietary requirements or restrictions which you are unaware of.

2. Know what are the higher risk foods

High risk foods are those which are moist and allow the easy growth of bacteria. If these foods are left out of the refrigerator for long periods of time, they will spoil and may cause food poisoning.

Examples of high risk foods include **but are not limited to:**

- › cooked meat including beef, pork, chicken and seafood
- › raw meat including beef, pork, chicken and seafood
- › processed meats like ham, polony, salami and pate
- › milk and milk products including flavoured milk, cheese, yoghurt and cream
- › cooked rice and pasta dishes.

High risk foods are best to avoid. If you are bringing these foods please read the following precautions carefully.



3. Preparing food

Safe food preparation is important. The following tips will help ensure food is safely prepared.

- › Wash your hands well with soap and water and dry thoroughly before handling food.
- › 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.
- › While cooking, ensure utensils and kitchen are kept clean.
- › If you are sick don't prepare food for patients.



4. Transporting food to hospital

When transporting food to the hospital, it should be kept at the correct temperature to reduce the risk of harmful bacteria growth.

Cold food

- › Maintain temperature under 5°C – refrigerator temperature.
- › Put cold food in an insulated cooler bag.
- › Pack food with an ice pack and don't 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 the temperature of the food drops below 60°C, then the food needs to be reheated to steaming hot.

Talk to the nurse or catering staff about microwave facilities on the ward.

Important: reheated food which has not been eaten cannot be refrigerated and should be thrown away.

5. Storing food

To reduce the risk of food poisoning, food brought into the hospital needs to be stored correctly.

Refrigerated food

Any high risk or perishable food which is not eaten immediately needs to be covered and stored in a refrigerator. When storing food at hospital:

- › you may only store a **small amount** of food in the ward fridges
- › all stored food **must be labelled** with the patients name, the date the food was prepared and the date it was put in the fridge
- › all potentially unsafe food stored in ward fridges and not **consumed within 24 hours** will be disposed of.

Non-refrigerated food

Wrapped, non-perishable foods can all be stored at room temperature. These include:

- › biscuits
- › chocolates
- › crackers
- › lollies.

Always check the 'use by' or 'best before' date on packaged commercially prepared food.

Important: once packaging is opened, it shortens the manufacturers 'use by' date.

6. Reheating food

When reheating food that you have brought to hospital:

- › ensure the entire meal is reheated to kill any bacteria that may be present
- › food should be reheated to at least 60°C (steaming hot)
- › when reheating frozen foods, ensure they are completely defrosted prior to reheating
- › thaw frozen food in the refrigerator or microwave (not at room temperature).



7. Do **not** share food with other patients

You should not provide food from home to other patients as they may also have special dietary requirements or restrictions which you are unaware of.

8. Patients with swallowing difficulties

Some patients may experience swallowing difficulties when they are in hospital. Swallowing is assessed by a speech pathologist, who may recommend the patient follow a texture modified diet or drink thickened fluids.

Texture modified diets

Texture modified diets reduce the amount of chewing required. They help patients swallow safely and reduce the risk of food going down the wrong way.

There are three types of texture modified diets available:

- › smooth puree
- › minced and moist
- › soft.

Thickened fluids

Some patients may find it difficult to swallow thin fluids such as water, milk, tea and coffee. Thickened drinks may be safer because they move around the mouth and through the throat more slowly and allow patients better control during swallowing.

If your loved one has been recommended thickened fluids or a texture modified diet, it is important that you check with the patient's speech pathologist before bringing any food or drinks from home.



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