

FOOD SAFETY TIPS

When you bring food into an aged care Centre for a relative or friend it is you and not the employees who is responsible for its safety.

It's really nice to show you care by cooking special or favorite meals for the resident of an aged care center - perhaps culturally specific food or a family favorite which is not normally available in the center.

But if you do, you really wouldn't want to make them sick, so there are some things you need to know.

Our immune systems get weaker as we get older. Also our stomachs produce less acid which makes it easier for harmful germs to get through the digestive system and invade our bodies.

If elderly people do get food poisoning, they are also likely to suffer more severe consequences. These can range from mild dehydration to neuromuscular dysfunction or even death. Older people also take longer than most of us to recover from food poisoning.

There are some foods that pose a higher risk than others, particularly of passing on a Listeria infection which is dangerous for the elderly. See 'Listeria and food' on the FSANZ website, <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au>.

What are the higher risk foods which shouldn't be provided for an elderly resident?

Cold meats	Cooked or uncooked, packaged or unpackaged e.g., roast beef, ham etc.
Cold cooked chicken	Purchased whole, portions, sliced or diced.
Pate	Refrigerated pate, liverwurst or meat spreads.
Salads	Pre-prepared or pre-packaged fruit, vegetables or salads e.g., from salad bars, retail outlets etc.
Chilled seafood	Raw or smoked ready-to-eat e.g., oysters, sashimi or sushi, smoked salmon or trout, sandwich fillings, pre-cooked peeled prawns such as in prawn cocktails and salads
Cheese	Pre-packaged and delicatessen soft, semi soft and surface ripened cheeses e.g., brie, camembert, ricotta, feta and blue
Ice cream	Soft serve
Other dairy products	Unpasteurised dairy products e.g., raw goats milk, cheese or yoghurt made from raw milk
Foods made with raw egg such as home-made egg mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, uncooked cakes and desserts and egg-nog can also be dangerous for the elderly.	

The elderly person may also have special dietary requirements or restrictions of which you are unaware. Please check with employees before providing food to an elderly resident.

What precautions should I take when preparing foods?

There are no special rules for cooking for elderly people – you just need to be even fussier than normal. If you plan to take chilled or frozen food you have cooked yourself, make sure that the food is cooled quickly in your refrigerator: never at room temperature. Always wash your hands well under running water using soap and dry thoroughly before handling food.

You can get information on preparing food safely from the fact sheet 'Protecting Tiny Tummies and Sensitive Systems' and other fact sheets on the Food Safety Information Council website, www.foodsafety.asn.au.

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How can I transport food safely for an elderly person?

You will need to transport your food to the aged care facility so take care that it is protected from contamination during transport and, if it is chilled food, it is kept cool or if you are taking it hot, you keep it hot during the journey.

Food should be kept at 5 degrees Celsius or cooler or, for hot food, at 60 degrees Celsius or hotter. Between 5 and 60 degrees is known as the temperature danger zone because harmful bacteria multiply to dangerous levels in food when it is kept between these temperatures.

Put cold food into a cooler with ice packs when travelling to visit your relative or friend. Don't pack food if it has just been cooked and is still warm. Coolers cannot cool food they can only keep cold food cool. Always cover pre-prepared foods securely and prechill them, for example, keep in the refrigerator overnight. Other perishable foods and drinks, such as deli products, cooked chicken and dairy products must also be cold when put in the cooler.

Hot food is difficult to keep hot and is best avoided if you are travelling long distances. If you must take hot food on a longer journey, an insulated jug, preheated with boiling water before being filled with the steaming hot food, can be used.

If you are unsure whether the jug will keep the food above 60°C, try filling it with water at 90°C, seal and test the water temperature after the length of time you expect your journey to take. If it is still above 60°C then you can use the jug. You will need a food thermometer to do this test. If any perishable food you bring is not eaten immediately, make sure it is refrigerated before you leave.

Reheating Food

Meath Care is unable to offer facilities to reheat food, if you are bringing hot food in please ensure that it maintains the minimum temperature of 60°C as described above.

Storage of the food you bring into the Centre

If any perishable food you have provided is not eaten immediately, tell the employees and ask them about storing the food in a refrigerator.

This food must be labelled and "day dotted" please ask employees for information.

Some elderly people like to keep extra food in their rooms in drawers or bedside tables for eating later. This is okay for shelf-stable foods like cakes, biscuits and chocolates, they must be in sealed containers and have the expiry date clearly visible. Perishable foods must be stored in the communal fridges available at each location.

This brochure has been adapted from the Food Safety Information Sheet developed by the Food safety information Council We aim to reduce the over five million cases of food poisoning in Australia each year by educating residents to handle food safely from the time it leaves the retailer until it appears on the plate. Website: www.foodsafety.asn.au.