

# **Reducing the Risk of Food Poisoning:**

Information for People who are Particularly  
Vulnerable

## **About this leaflet**

All of us can get sick if we eat unsafe food, but some of us are more at risk than others. This leaflet tells you about safe food choices that can reduce your risk of getting food poisoning. The information here is especially important if you, or someone you are caring for, is at special risk of infection.

The level of risk for every person is different and changes over time. You should ask your doctor if you have any questions about your own health or the health of someone you are caring for.

We hope this leaflet will help you strike a balance between eating what you enjoy while avoiding the risk of infection.

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## **About safe food choices**

Some foods can carry bacteria, viruses or poisons (toxins) that can cause illness. The illness often includes food poisoning where you have diarrhoea and or vomiting. Sometimes though, it can cause other kinds of serious illness. To help keep healthy:

- Wash your hands before you eat
- Wash your hands before you prepare food
- Choose safe food choices (see page 5)
- Cook food properly

If you are ill and frail, you might not feel like eating but eating foods you like is important to keep well-nourished and in good spirits.

## **Who is vulnerable to food poisoning?**

Research tells us that people vulnerable to food poisoning are generally people whose natural defence barriers have been affected by age, disease and or medication. Natural defence barriers include stomach acid, a healthy mix of bacteria in the gut, and a fully functioning immune system.

Often the people who are most vulnerable are those who:

- Have cancer and or who are undergoing cancer chemotherapy or radiation therapy or are in recovery from same
- Have had transplants
- Are on drugs such as high doses of steroids to modify their immune system. These are often used to treat conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus and inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis
- Have human immunodeficiency virus type-1 (HIV-1) infections which attack the immune system
- Have acquired immune-deficiency syndrome (AIDS)
- Have diabetes (especially if it is not well controlled)
- Have kidney failure
- Have haemochromatosis
- Have thalassemia
- Have liver conditions like cirrhosis
- Are on medication to control stomach acid
- Are ill
- Are pregnant
- Are very young
- Are elderly

**Ask your doctor for advice if you are in doubt.**

## What are the risks?

Even if you are vulnerable to food poisoning, most micro-organisms are usually harmless to most people. However, some micro-organisms in food and or water can cause serious infection in people whose natural defence barriers are weak. Some can cause very serious illness in vulnerable or frail people.

For vulnerable people, the risk of infection or food poisoning is much greater with particular types of foods. If you know which foods present the greatest risk, then you can make the choice that is right for you. Ask yourself, if the food you eat:

- Is something that you enjoy so much that you want to take the risk?
- Can be replaced by a safer alternative that is also nourishing and enjoyable?

## What are high and low-risk foods?

The following general tips can alter your risk of food poisoning. Firstly, it is important to identify some of the general features of low and higher risk foods.



### Higher risk foods:

- **Foods that have been handled a lot after they were cooked** such as loose or packaged sliced meats, sandwiches and salads
- **Foods eaten after their use-by date**



### Low-risk foods:

- **Food that has been thoroughly cooked and that is served direct from the oven or pot is almost always safe even for very vulnerable people** ('thoroughly cooked' means that the food is heated to at least 75°C at its centre. We recommend that you use a food thermometer to check this temperature)
- **Canned foods**
- **Fresh cooked fish**
- **Pasteurised milk, mains water** from the public supply and **packaged pasteurised fruit juices** from reputable manufacturers

The following section contains a guide to higher risk foods and safer options.

## Guide to higher risk foods and safer options

### Seafood



#### Higher risk foods

- Raw or cooked oysters and mussels
- Dishes containing oysters and mussels
- Raw or partially cooked shrimps, prawns and crab
- Smoked salmon or gravadlax
- Raw or undercooked fish, e.g. sushi



#### Safer options

- Thoroughly cooked fish, crab, shrimps and prawns
- Dishes containing fish, crab, shrimp or prawns that have been thoroughly cooked
- Canned fish and seafood

### Milk and dairy products



#### Higher risk foods

- Unpasteurised cream, crème fraîche, yoghurts and unpasteurised milk
- All soft or semi soft cheese such as feta, brie, camembert and gorgonzola
- Uncooked desserts made from unpasteurised milk and or cream
- Ice-cream made from unpasteurised milk or cream



#### Safer options

- Sterilised or pasteurised milk, cream, crème fraîche and yoghurts
- Hard cheese made from pasteurised milk, cream cheese and processed cheese (cheeses with colourings, salt and so on added)
- Desserts made with pasteurised or sterilised milk or cream
- Ice-cream made from pasteurised or sterilised milk. This includes most branded ice-creams and whipped ice-cream

## Fruit, vegetables and grains



### Higher risk foods

- Frozen vegetables thawed and eaten without thorough cooking
- Fresh or frozen skinless soft fruits such as raspberries and strawberries
- Pre-prepared fresh fruit such as packets of sliced or diced fruits
- Pre-prepared salads, e.g. coleslaw including packets of washed salad leaves
- Unwashed fresh salad leaves
- Pre-cooked and cooled vegetables and rice served cold or reheated unless prepared under strict cook chill controls. (Cook chill controls involves the full cooking of food, followed by rapid chilling and storage at controlled temperatures for a number of days.)
- Raw sprouts and sprouted seeds (such raw onions, radishes, lentils, peas, chickpeas) or salads containing these seeds
- Unpasteurised fruit and vegetable juices (usually sold at farmer markets, juice bars and local orchards)



### Safer options

- Thoroughly cooked frozen vegetables and frozen berries
- Hard fruits that are washed, undamaged and whole such as apples and pears
- Washed grapes
- Fruits with skin you can't eat such as oranges, satsumas, kiwis and bananas
- Fresh whole salad leaves that are washed before eating
- Thoroughly cooked dishes containing fruit or vegetables
- Thoroughly cooked desserts containing fruit
- Pasteurised fruit and vegetable juices or freshly squeezed orange juice
- Canned and jarred fruit and vegetables
- Preserved and pickled fruit and vegetables

## Meat and meat products



### Higher risk foods

- Undercooked or lightly cooked meat
- Refrigerated deli meats (loose or packaged)
- Refrigerated pâtés



### Safer options

- Thoroughly cooked meat joints, steaks and minced meat dishes
- Dishes containing deli meats that have been thoroughly cooked
- Canned meat
- Pâté in a jar or can

## Egg and egg products



### Higher risk foods

- Raw or partly cooked eggs like soft boiled egg
- Dishes containing part cooked eggs such as carbonara
- Cold desserts made with raw fresh egg. An example is tiramisu and mousse.
- Homemade mayonnaise
- Egg fried rice



### Safer options

- Hard boiled and hard fried eggs
- Thoroughly cooked scrambled egg
- Dishes and desserts made with egg that are thoroughly cooked
- Dishes made with pasteurised liquid egg
- Cold desserts made with pasteurised liquid egg
- Commercial mayonnaise made with pasteurised egg

## Sandwiches



### Higher risk foods

- Sandwiches containing any of the foods listed in this 'higher risk' sections (Red)



### Safer options

- Sandwiches containing safer options foods listed in the safer option section (Green)
- Packaged cold and hot soups

## Drinks



### Higher risk foods

- Unchlorinated drinking water from private wells and group scheme sources
- Unpasteurised milk
- Unpasteurised fruit and vegetable juices
- Water from a hot tap



### Safer options

- Boiled water
- Hot drinks
- Pasteurised milk and juices
- Chlorinated mains drinking water from a public supply or group scheme