



Older Adults and Food Safety

An adage states, "With age, comes wisdom." Hopefully that wisdom includes lots of good food safety information. Why? As we mature, our bodies change. Older adults become more at-risk for illness and, once ill, it can take them longer to recover.

Knowledge of safe food handling helps older adults stay healthy. Some older adults are homebound and must rely on delivered food. Others have minimal cooking experience. It's important to understand the effect of pathogens and other microorganisms on elderly bodies. Practicing the safeguards necessary to avoid foodborne illness is the best way to stay healthy.

As people age, their bodies are less able to combat bacteria. For example, there is a decrease in stomach acid secretion, which is a natural defense against ingested bacteria. And over time, the immune system may become less adept in ridding the body of bacteria.

Too, the sense of taste or smell — sometimes affected by medication or illness — may not always sound an alert when meat is spoiled or milk may be sour.

What is Foodborne Illness?

Foodborne illness, often called food poisoning, is any illness that is caused by the food you eat. Safe food handling can help reduce your risk of getting sick from food.

What are the Signs of Foodborne Illness?

The signs and symptoms of foodborne illness range from upset stomach, diarrhea, fever, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and dehydration, to more severe illness — or even death. Consumers can take simple measures to reduce their risk of foodborne illness, especially in the home. If you experience the symptoms of foodborne illness, call your doctor or health care provider.

Guidelines for Safe Food Handling

Experienced or inexperienced, it is just good sense for older cooks to follow up-to-date food safety guidelines.

1. Keep it safe; refrigerate or freeze all perishable food. Check your refrigerator and freezer temperatures with an appliance thermometer. Your refrigerator temperature should be set at 40 °F or below; freezer temperature should be 0 °F or below. Use a refrigerator/freezer thermometer to check the temperatures.
2. Never thaw food at room temperature. Always thaw food in the refrigerator, in cold water or in a microwave. After thawing in cold water or in the microwave, you must cook the food immediately.
3. Wash hands with warm soapy water before preparing food. Wash hands, utensils, cutting boards, and other work surfaces after contact with raw meat and poultry. This helps prevent cross contamination.
4. Never leave perishable food out of refrigeration for more than two hours. If room temperature is above 90 °F, food should not be left out more than 1 hour. This would include items such as take-out foods, leftovers from a restaurant meal, and meals-on wheels deliveries.
5. Thoroughly cook raw meat, poultry, and fish (see the following chart of safe internal temperatures). Do not partially cook food. Have a constant heat source, and always set the oven at 325 °F or higher when cooking. There is no need to bring food to room temperature before cooking.

Foods Purchased or Delivered Hot

Eating Within Two Hours?

Pick up or receive the food HOT...and enjoy eating within two hours.

Not Eating Within Two Hours?

Keeping food warm is not enough. Harmful bacteria can multiply between 40° and 140 °F. Set the oven temperature high enough to keep the hot food at 140 °F or above. Check the internal temperature of food with a food thermometer. Covering with foil will help keep the food moist.

Eating Much Later?

It's not a good idea to try and keep the food hot longer than two hours. Food will taste better and be safely stored if you:

- Place food in shallow containers.
- Divide large quantities into smaller portions.
- Cover loosely and refrigerate immediately.
- Reheat thoroughly when ready to eat.

Reheating?

Reheat food thoroughly to a temperature of 165 °F or until hot and steaming. In the microwave oven, cover food and rotate so it heats evenly. Allow standing time for more even heating.

Consult your microwave owner's manual for recommended cooking time, power level and standing time. Inadequate heating can contribute to illness.

Foods Purchased or Delivered Cold

Keep Cold Food Cold

Eat or refrigerate immediately. Cold food should be held at 40 °F or colder.

The Two Hour Rule

Perishable food should not be left out at room temperature longer than two hours. Discard food which has been left at room temperature longer than two hours. For temperatures above 90 °F, discard food after one hour.

USDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures

Cook foods to the following safe minimum internal temperatures as measured with a food thermometer.

FOOD	TEMPERATURE
Fresh ground beef, pork, veal, lamb	160 °F
Beef, pork, lamb, veal* (roasts, steaks, chops) *as measured with a food thermometer before removing meat from the heat source. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat and poultry to higher temperatures.	145 °F
Ham, cook before eating*	145 °F
Ham, fully cooked, to reheat	140 °F
Poultry, whole, parts or ground	165 °F
Fish	145 °F
Egg dishes, casseroles	160 °F
Leftovers, to reheat	165 °F
Hot dogs, luncheon meats, bologna, and other deli meats	165 °F or until steaming hot

Other Numbers Helpful to Older Adults

National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics
Consumer Nutrition Hotline
1-800-366-1655

Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
Food and Drug Administration,
1-888-723-3366

American Heart Association
1-800-242-8721

American Institute for Cancer Research
1-800-843-8114
(Washington DC area only), 202-328-7744

American Diabetes Association
1-800-232-3472

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1-888-246-2675

COLD STORAGE CHART

Product	Refrigerator (40 °F)	Freezer (0 °F)
Eggs Fresh, in shell	3-5 weeks	Don't freeze in shell. Beat yolks and whites together to freeze. 12 months Do not freeze.
Fresh, whites	2 to 4 days	
Hard cooked	1 week	
TV Dinners	Keep frozen until ready to use	3 to 4 months
Deli prepared convenience foods such as egg, chicken, ham, and macaroni salads	3-5 days	Do not freeze.
Hot dogs & Lunch Meats Hot dogs, opened package Hot dog, unopened package Lunch meats, opened or deli sliced Lunch meats, unopened	1 week 2 weeks 3-5 days 2 weeks	1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months
Soups and Stews Vegetable or meat added	3-4 days	2-3 months
Ground Meat and Poultry	1-2 days	3-4 months
Bacon Sausage	7 days 1-2 days	1 month 1-2 months
Ham Ham, fully cooked—whole Ham, fully cooked—half or slices	7 days 3-5 days	1-2 months 1-2 months
Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb & Pork Steaks Chops Roasts	3-5 days 3-5 days 3-5 days	6-12 months 4-6 months 4-12 months
Fresh Poultry Chicken or turkey, whole Chicken or turkey pieces	1-2 days 1-2 days	1 year 9 months
Meat or Poultry Leftovers	3-4 days	2-6 months

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**. The hotline is open year-round



Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at

www.fsis.usda.gov

Send e-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a live chat during Hotline hours.



AskKaren.gov

PregunteleaKaren.gov