



# Food Safety

for Older Adults



# Food Safety for Older Adults

As an older adult, you know the importance of preparing food safely at home. But did you know your risk of food-borne illness (food poisoning) increases with age? Did you know you should take special care to reduce this risk?

## *About this Guide*

This guide explains why older adults are at higher risk for food-borne illness and what you can do to protect yourself.

We look at four critical steps in food safety, including how to properly **clean, separate, cook** and **chill** food. To reduce the risk of food-borne illness, we also provide a list of foods older adults should avoid.

# Be Food Safe.



# Food-borne illness

People get sick from food prepared at home more often than you might think. It is estimated that there are approximately 11 million cases of food-borne illness every year in Canada.

Illness is caused by food or drink that contains bacteria, viruses or parasites such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, etc.

Common symptoms include:

***Diarrhea***  
***Vomiting***

***Stomach cramps***  
***Fever***

***Nausea***  
***Headache***

These symptoms appear several hours, several days or more than a month after eating contaminated food.

# You are at higher risk

Older adults are at higher risk for many reasons. As we age, it becomes harder for our immune systems to fight off harmful bacteria, viruses or parasites. Chronic diseases, including diabetes, arthritis and kidney disease, can make fighting off infection more difficult.

Most people recover completely from food-borne illness. However, adults aged 60 and older are more likely to develop serious long-term health problems. Some of these conditions include kidney failure, anaemia and even death.

## ***Take extra care to prevent illness***

Fortunately, most cases of food-borne illness can be prevented. Older adults — and those who prepare food for them — should be especially careful to follow the food safety guidelines in this booklet.





# **CLEAN**

*Wash hands and surfaces often.*

Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get on hands, cutting boards, knives and countertops. Clean often to prevent illness.



## *Wash hands and kitchen equipment often*

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot, soapy water after any contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and unwashed fresh produce.
- Wash kitchen cloths — often — in the hot cycle of a washing machine.
- For added protection, use a commercial kitchen sanitizer as directed, or make your own bleach solution: mix 5 ml (1 tsp) of household bleach to 750ml (3 cups) of water.



## *Don't forget re-usable grocery bags*

Wash reusable grocery bags often. This is especially important for bags used to carry meat, poultry, fish or seafood.

## *Wash fresh fruit and vegetables*

- Wash fresh fruit and vegetables under cool running water. This includes fruit and vegetables with a skin/ rind that is not eaten.
- Use a clean vegetable brush to wash produce with a firm skin, including carrots, potatoes, melons and squash.
- Do not use detergent or bleach to wash fruit or vegetables.

**Handwashing  
is one of the best ways to prevent  
food-borne illness.**



# SEPARATE

*Don't cross-contaminate.*

Cross-contamination occurs when bacteria are spread from one food to another. To avoid this, keep raw meat, poultry and seafood (and their juices) separate from cooked or ready-to-eat foods.

## Grocery cart and fridge

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other food in your grocery cart, grocery bags and fridge.
- Place raw meat, seafood and poultry on the bottom shelf of your fridge so juices from these foods cannot drip onto other foods.

## Cutting boards

Use one cutting board for ready-to-eat food and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.



## Serving plates

Always put cooked food on a **clean** plate. Never place it on an **unwashed** plate previously used for raw meat or unwashed produce.



## COOK

*Cook to proper temperatures.*

Food is properly cooked when it is at a **high enough temperature** to kill harmful bacteria, such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella* and *Listeria*. Be sure to cook food to proper internal temperatures.



## MYTH: You can tell if meat is cooked by checking its colour

### *Use a food thermometer*

Always use a food thermometer to make sure meat, poultry, egg dishes, casseroles and other foods are cooked to safe internal temperatures. (See the *Safe Cooking Temperatures* chart).

### *Microwave safely*

Cover your food and rotate the dish once or twice during cooking (unless you have a turntable) and stir the contents of the dish. This will help to cook your food evenly. Allow for standing time to finish cooking.

### *Keep food hot*

If cooked food is not eaten immediately, keep it hot at 60°C (140°F) or higher, until it is eaten. If you don't keep hot food hot, chill it quickly.

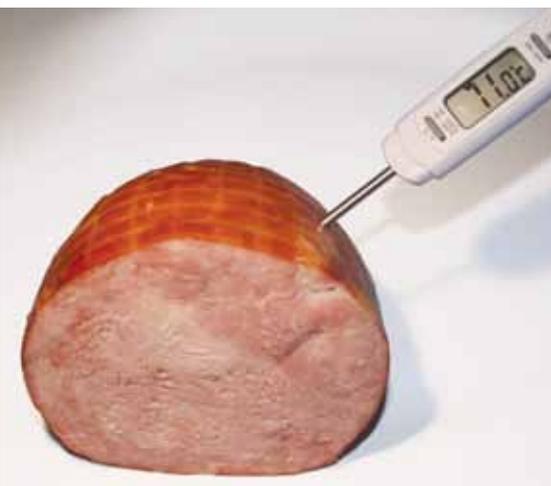
### *Reheat leftovers*

- Reheat solid foods to 74°C (165°F) or higher.
- Reheat sauces, soups and gravy to a rolling boil. Make sure to stir while heating.

Despite common belief, the colour of meat is **not** a reliable sign that meat is done or safe to eat. Meat *can* turn brown before all the bacteria are killed. The **only** way to know if food is thoroughly cooked is to use a food thermometer.

# Food Thermometer TIPS:

- Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat, all the way to the middle. Make sure the thermometer is not touching any bone or fat.
- Clean the thermometer with hot water and soap after each time you use it (between readings).
- Digital instant-read probe thermometers are the easiest to handle.



# Safe Cooking Temperatures

Ground Meat and Mixtures	
Ground beef, pork, veal, lamb	71°C (160°F)
Ground turkey, chicken	74°C (165°F)
Hot dogs	74°C (165°F)
Beef, Veal, Lamb	
Whole cuts and pieces	Medium Rare 63°C (145°F)
	Medium 71°C (160°F)
	Well Done 77°C (170°F)
Poultry (e.g., chicken, turkey, duck)	
Whole	85°C (185°F)
Parts	74°C (165°F)
Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)	74°C (165°F)
Pork	
Pieces and whole cuts	71°C (160°F)
Ham	
Fresh (raw)	71°C (160°F)
Pre-cooked (to reheat)	74°C (165°F)
Eggs	
Egg dishes	74 °C (165 °F)
Seafood	
Fin fish	70°C (158°F)
Shrimp, lobster, crabs	74°C (165°F)
Clams, oysters, mussels	Shells open during cooking time
Leftovers and Casseroles	
All left over foods	74°C (165°F)

(Cooking temperatures provided by Health Canada)



# CHILL

*Chill promptly.*

The bacteria in food stored at room temperature doubles every 20 minutes. One of the most effective ways to prevent food-borne illness is to keep food properly chilled. Chilling food slows the growth of harmful bacteria.

## Set your fridge at 4°C

Is your fridge cold enough? Make sure your fridge is set at 4°C (40°F) or lower. Check the temperature with a fridge thermometer, from time to time. (If your fridge does not have a built-in thermometer, you can purchase one at a store that sells kitchen gadgets).

## Remember the “Two Hour Rule”

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food, prepared food and leftovers within two hours. This “Rule” includes food from the grocery store, food left on the counter, etc.
- Discard food that has been left out for longer than two hours.

# Defrost food safely

There are three ways to defrost food safely:

1. In the refrigerator.
2. Under cold running water.
3. In the microwave.  
(If you use a microwave to defrost, cook the food immediately afterward).



Avoid defrosting food at room temperature, *this includes on the countertop.*

**Keep hot foods hotter than 60°C (140°F).**  
**Keep cold foods colder than 4°C (40°F).**

## Store canned food safely

- Never eat food from jars with loose or bulging lids, or eat from badly dented, bulging or leaking cans.
- Store cans in a cool, dry, clean place.
- Eat within one to two years or before the 'best before' date on the jar/can.

## MYTH:

**You can tell if food has spoiled by the way it looks, smells and tastes.**

Using sight, smell and taste to judge if food is safe is unreliable. As we age, our sense of sight, smell and taste is reduced. These less acute senses reduce our ability to notice the warning signs of spoiled food. At the same time, some foods may be unsafe to eat without tasting or smelling bad.



## Store food safely

- Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quicker cooling in the fridge.
- Refrigerate leftovers promptly and use them as soon as possible (See *Cold Storage* chart).

## Follow 'best before' dates correctly

The 'best before' date on food packaging indicates how long the unopened food will keep its freshness and high quality. Once it is opened, the 'best before' date no longer applies.



The storage life of any food depends on how that food is stored. Use the 'best before' date, along with the *Cold Storage Guidelines*, to determine how long to keep food in the fridge. If in doubt, throw it out!

# High Risk Foods

According to Health Canada, the foods listed below have been linked to outbreaks of food-borne illnesses. These foods must be **fully cooked** to eliminate bacteria. To reduce risk, older adults should **avoid** eating these foods in a raw or semi-cooked state:

- Raw meat or under-cooked poultry.
- Raw fin fish and shellfish, including:  
Oysters, clams, mussels and scallops.
- Raw or unpasteurized milk from cows or goats, or foods made from unpasteurized milk.
- If you use cheese made from unpasteurized milk, only eat cheeses aged for 60 days or longer.
- Soft cheeses, including:  
Feta, brie, camembert, and queso blanco fresco.
- Raw or lightly cooked egg or egg products, including:  
Salad dressings, cookie or cake batter, sauces, and homemade eggnog.  
If you choose to make eggnog with whole eggs, heat the milk mixture to 71C° (160°F).  
Foods made from commercially pasteurized eggs have a reduced risk.
- Raw sprouts, including:  
Alfalfa, clover, radish and mung beans.
- Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider.





## **Make sure eggs are cooked.**

Although *Salmonella* bacteria are not common in Canadian eggs, older adults are at a higher risk of getting sick from eggs. Take extra care when you handle eggs and cook all eggs to their safe internal temperature.

## *Here are some tips:*

- Avoid raw and undercooked eggs.
- Purchase refrigerated Grade A eggs.
- Throw away slightly cracked or dirty eggs.
- Store eggs in their original carton, on a shelf in the fridge.
- Cook eggs until both the white and yolk are firm (avoid soft boiled).
- Cook egg dishes to 74°C (165°F) or higher.

Pasteurized liquid egg products can be used when making uncooked food dishes that call for raw eggs.

**Eat eggs promptly after cooking and refrigerate leftovers within two hours.**



## *Heat hot dogs and deli meats.*

Health Canada recommends that older adults avoid eating cold deli meats and hot dogs straight out of the package. To reduce your risk of food-borne illness, do not eat hot dogs and deli meats until these foods are steaming hot or reach an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).



## Food safety in the community

Many churches, community centres, private clubs and condominium complexes in York Region have kitchens used for potluck suppers, seniors' luncheons and other community functions.

If you are a volunteer or if you participate in community events, please pass on these four food safety steps: **clean, separate, cook** and **chill**. Remind everyone to make food safety a priority.

## Be Food Safe.

**Sources:** Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education. [www.canfightbac.org](http://www.canfightbac.org) [www.befoodsafe.ca](http://www.befoodsafe.ca)

Safe Food Handling for Adults 60+. Health Canada, 2010. Reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health, 2012.

# Safe Cooking Temperatures

## Ground Meat and Mixtures

Ground beef, pork, veal, lamb	71°C (160°F)
Ground turkey, chicken	74°C (165°F)
Hot dogs	74°C (165°F)

## Beef, Veal, Lamb

Whole cuts and pieces	Medium Rare	63°C (145°F)
	Medium	71°C (160°F)
	Well Done	77°C (170°F)

## Poultry (e.g., chicken, turkey, duck)

Whole	85°C (185°F)
Parts	74°C (165°F)
Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)	74°C (165°F)

## Pork

Pieces and whole cuts	71°C (160°F)
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## Ham

Fresh (raw)	71°C (160°F)
Pre-cooked (to reheat)	74°C (165°F)

## Eggs

Egg dishes	74 °C (165 °F)
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## Seafood

Fin fish	70°C (158°F)
Shrimp, lobster, crabs	74°C (165°F)
Clams, oysters, mussels	Shells open during cooking time

## Leftovers and Casseroles

All left over foods	74°C (165°F)
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(Cooking temperatures provided by Health Canada)





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be food safe.



clean. separate.  
cook. chill.

[www.befoodsafe.ca](http://www.befoodsafe.ca)

For more information on food safety,  
please call York Region Health Connection  
at **1-800-361-5653**, TTY **1-866-252-9933**  
or visit **[www.york.ca/foodsafety](http://www.york.ca/foodsafety)**

  
**York Region**

# Cold Storage Guidelines: For refrigerators and freezers

Use these time limit guidelines to help keep refrigerated and frozen food safe to eat.

	Refrigerator 4°C (40°F)	Freezer -18°C (0°F)
<b>Fresh Meat</b>		
Beef—steaks, roasts	2-4 days	10-12 months
Pork—chops, roasts	2-4 days	8-12 months
Lamb—chops, roasts	2-4 days	8-12 months
Veal roasts	3-4 days	8-12 months
Ground meat	1-2 days	2-3 months
<b>Fresh Poultry</b>		
Chicken, turkey—whole	2-3 days	1 year
Chicken, turkey—pieces	2-3 days	6 months
<b>Fresh Fish</b>		
Lean fish (i.e., cod, flounder)	3-4 days	6 months
Fatty fish (i.e., salmon)	3-4 days	6 months
Shellfish (clams, crab, lobster)	12-24 hours	2-4 months
Scallops, shrimp, cooked shellfish	1-2 days	2-4 months
<b>Ham</b>		
Canned ham	6-9 months	Don't Freeze
Ham, fully cooked (half and slices)	3-4 days	2-3 months
<b>Bacon and Sausage</b>		
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Sausage, raw (pork, beef, turkey)	1-2 days	1-2 months
Pre-cooked, smoked links or patties	1 week	1-2 months
<b>Leftovers</b>		
Cooked meat, stews, egg or vegetable dishes	3-4 days	2-3 months
Gravy and meat broth	1-2 days	2-3 months
Cooked poultry and fish	3-4 days	4-6 months
Soups	2-3 days	4 months
<b>Hot Dogs and Lunch Meats</b>		
Hot dogs	2 weeks	1-2 months
opened	1 week	
Lunch meats	2 weeks	1-2 months
opened	3-5 days	1-2 months
<b>Deli Foods</b>		
Deli meats	3-4 days	2-3 months
Store-prepared or homemade salads	3-5 days	Don't Freeze

# Cold Storage Guidelines

Refrigerator  
4°C (40°F)

Freezer  
-18°C (0°F)

TV Dinners / Frozen Casseroles		
Keep frozen until ready to serve		3-4 months
Eggs		
Fresh—in shell	3-4 weeks	Don't freeze
out of shell	2-4 days	4 months
Hardcooked	1 week	Doesn't freeze well
Egg substitutes	10 days	Don't freeze
opened	3 days	1 year
Dairy Products		
Milk	Check best before date	6 weeks
opened	3 days	
Cottage cheese	Check best before date	Doesn't freeze well
opened	3 days	
Yogurt	Check best before date	1-2 months
opened	3 days	
Butter—salted	8 weeks	1 year
unsalted		3 months
opened	3 weeks	Don't freeze
Cheese		
soft	1 week	Doesn't freeze well
semi-soft	2-3 weeks	8 weeks
firm	5 weeks	3 months
hard	10 months	Up to a year
processed	Several months	3 months
opened	3-4 weeks	Don't freeze
Commercial Mayonnaise		
(Refrigerate after opening)	2 months	Don't freeze
Vegetables		
Beans, green or waxed	5 days	8 months
Carrots	2 weeks	10-12 months
Celery	2 weeks	10-12 months
Lettuce, leaf	3-7 days	Don't freeze
Lettuce, iceberg	1-2 weeks	Don't freeze
Spinach	2-4 days	10-12 months
Squash, summer	1 week	10-12 months
Squash, winter	2 weeks	10-12 months
Tomatoes	Not recommended	2 months