

Eating Out, Bringing In



Let's face it. Sometimes it's just easier and more enjoyable to let someone else do the cooking. And for today's seniors there are many eating options. All of these options, however, do have food safety implications that you need to be aware of.

Bringing In: Complete Meals to Go and Home Delivered Meals

When you want to eat at home but don't feel like cooking or aren't able to, where do you turn? Many convenience foods, including complete meals to go, are increasingly popular. Purchased from grocery stores, deli stores or restaurants, some meals are hot and some are cold. Ordering home delivered meals from restaurants or restaurant-delivery services is an option many consumers like to take advantage of. And of course, for those who qualify, there are programs like Meals on Wheels that provide a ready-prepared meal each day. Hot or cold ready-prepared meals are perishable and can cause illness when mishandled. *Proper handling is essential to ensure the food is safe.*

The 2-Hour Rule

Harmful bacteria can multiply in the "danger zone" (between 40 and 140 degrees F). So remember the 2-hour rule. *Discard any perishable foods left at room temperature longer than 2 hours.* (When temperatures are above 90°F, discard food after 1 hour!)

Putting the 2-hour rule into action:

HOT FOODS: When you purchase hot cooked food, keep it hot. Eat and enjoy your food within 2 hours to prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying. If you are not eating within 2 hours—and you want to keep your food hot—keep your food in the oven set at a high enough temperature to keep the food at or above 140 degrees F. (Use a food thermometer to check the temperature.) Side dishes, like stuffing, must also stay hot in the oven. Covering food will help keep it moist.

However, your cooked food will taste better if you don't try to keep it in the oven for too long. For best taste, refrigerate the food and then reheat when you are ready to eat. Here's how - Divide meat or poultry into small portions to refrigerate or freeze. Refrigerate or freeze gravy, potatoes, and other vegetables in shallow containers. Remove stuffing from whole cooked poultry and refrigerate.

COLD FOODS should be eaten within 2 hours or refrigerated or frozen for eating another time. Reheating? You may wish to reheat your meal, whether it was purchased hot and then refrigerated or

purchased cold initially. Heat the food thoroughly to 165°F until hot and steaming. Bring gravy to a rolling boil. If heating in a microwave oven, cover food and rotate the dish so the food heats evenly and doesn't



leave “cold spots” that could harbor bacteria. Consult your owner’s manual for complete instructions.

Eating Out

Whether you’re eating out at a restaurant, a Senior Center, or a fast food diner, it can be both a safe and enjoyable experience. All food service establishments are required to follow food safety guidelines set by State and local health departments. But you can also take actions to insure your food’s safety. Keep these Fight BAC!™ rules in mind: Clean, Cook, Chill.

Clean: When you go out to eat, look at how clean things are before you even sit down. If it’s not up to your standards, you might want to eat somewhere else.

Cook: No matter where you eat out, always order your food cooked thoroughly to a safe internal temperature. Remember that foods like meat, poultry, fish, and eggs need to be cooked thoroughly to kill harmful bacteria. When you’re served a hot meal, make sure it’s served to you piping hot and thoroughly cooked, and if it’s not, send it back. Don’t eat undercooked or raw foods, such as raw oysters or raw or undercooked eggs. Undercooked or raw eggs can be a hidden hazard in some foods like Caesar salad, custards and some sauces. If these foods are made with commercially pasteurized eggs, however, they are safe. If you are unsure about the ingredients in a particular dish, ask before ordering it.

Chill

The Doggie Bag - It seems like meal portions are getting bigger and bigger these days. A lot of people are packing up these leftovers to eat later. Care must be taken when handling these leftovers. If you will not be arriving home within 2 hours of being served, it is safer to leave the leftovers at the restaurant. Also, remember that the inside of a car can get very warm. Bacteria may grow rapidly, so it is

always safer to go directly home after eating and put your leftovers in the refrigerator. Some Senior Centers that provide meals do not allow food to be taken away from the site because they know how easy it is for bacteria to multiply to dangerous levels when food is left unrefrigerated too long. Check with your center for its policy on taking leftovers home.



More Information

If you have questions and you’d like to talk to an expert, please call the following toll-free hotlines.

You can reach the Food and Drug Administration by calling: 1-888-SAFEFOOD. The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline is 1-800-535-4555. Or use your computer to get food safety information at www.FoodSafety.gov

Text – **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**
Brochure “To Your Health! Food Safety for Seniors”
www.fda.gov

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