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Following the 2 hour / 4 hour rule



Any ready-to-eat or high risk food that has been between 5°C – 60°C:

Food Safety for the health of vulnerable Australians

Through the Training, Audits & production of Food Safety Programs we conduct at OSCAR Care Group, we find the 2-hour / 4-hour rule attracts the most questions.

This rule is followed to control the length of time food is in the Danger Zone (between 5°C and 60°C). Using this rule proves to reduce the growth of unwanted micro-organisms.

Total time between 5°C and 60°C	Action
Less than 2 hours	Refrigerate or use immediately.
Between 2 hours and 4 hours	Use immediately or throw out.
More than 4 hours	Throw out.

Applying the 2-hour / 4-hour Rule to Cooling

To cool food from 60°C to ≤ 21°C in 2 hrs & from ≤ 21°C to ≤ 5°C in a further 4 hrs in refrigeration.

Time	Core Temperature
Less than 2 hours	60°C to ≤ 21°C
Less than 4 hours (2+4 = 6hrs total)	≤ 21°C to ≤ 5°C
Food is suitable to freeze	≤ 5°C

There are no special rules for cooking for the vulnerable– you just need to be even fussier & more careful than normal!

Follow these [simple food hygiene](#) basics to reduce the risk of foodborne disease:

- Thoroughly wash and dry your hands before preparing food, particularly before preparing ready-to-eat food.
- Keep your refrigerator clean and operate it at or below 5°C.
- Wash knives, cutting boards and kitchen appliances and dry thoroughly after handling raw food to prevent contamination of cooked and ready-to-eat foods.
- Thoroughly wash and dry raw fruit and vegetables before eating or juicing.
- If you are keeping food hot, keep it very hot (60°C or hotter). Keep cold food cold (5°C or colder).



- Store raw meat separately from cooked and ready-to-eat food in the refrigerator. Store it below other foods so that there is no chance it will drip onto other foods.
- Thaw ready-to-eat frozen food in the refrigerator or microwave – don't thaw at room temperature.
- Thoroughly cook all minced meat products, rolled roasts and poultry to 75 °C.
- Don't leave foods to cool on the bench or stove top. Divide into small portions and put them in the refrigerator as soon as they have stopped steaming.

0 to 2 hours

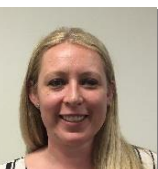
Use immediately, or keep at or below 5°C, or at or above 60°C

2 to 4 hours

Use immediately

More than 4 hours

Throw away



Do you need further Food Safety information?

This article is provided by Sarah Friedrich, OSCAR Care Group Food Safety Auditor & Trainer. Please call or email Sarah via our contact details below.



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