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## Preparing food for the Vulnerable

By Sarah Friedrich, OSCAR Care Group Food Safety Auditor & Trainer



### Food Safety for the health of Australia's Elderly Citizens

It's nice to show you care by cooking special favourite meals for a resident in aged care – perhaps culturally specific food or a family favourite which is not normally available in that facility. But if you do, you wouldn't want to make them sick, so here are some things you need to know. This information may also be useful when preparing food for any elderly friend or relative.

Our immune system weakens as we get older. Also, our stomachs produce less acid which makes it easier for harmful germs to get through our digestive system and invade our bodies.

If elderly people do get food poisoning, they are also likely to suffer more severe symptoms or consequences. These can range from mild dehydration to neuromuscular dysfunction or even death. Older people can also take longer to recover from food poisoning.

There are some foods that pose a higher risk than others, particularly of passing on a Listeria infection which is very dangerous for the elderly.

### What are the higher risk foods?

Foods made with raw or minimally cooked egg eg home-made egg mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, uncooked cakes or desserts & eggnog can be dangerous for the elderly & shouldn't be provided.

Raw seafood such as oysters can be naturally contaminated with Vibrio species that are present in seawater. People with diminishing and poor immune systems can be highly susceptible and infections can result in death.

Some foods pose a higher risk than others, particularly when Listeria infection can be very dangerous to the elderly. These tend to be perishable foods that need to be refrigerated and that have been prepared well in advance and are eaten without further cooking.

## High Risk Foods

Food type	Examples
Cold Meats	Cooked or uncooked, unpackaged or packaged sliced ready-to-eat eg roast beef, ham etc
Cold cooked chicken	Purchased whole, portions, sliced or pre-packaged chicken sandwiches
Paté	Refrigerated paté, liverwurst or meat spreads
Fruit and vegetables	Pre-prepared or pre-packaged fruit, vegetables or salads e.g. from salad bars, retail outlets etc. Frozen fruit and vegetables that are eaten raw without cooking eg berries, corn kernels.
Chilled seafood	Raw or smoked ready-to-eat seafood e.g. oysters, smoked salmon or trout, sandwich fillings, mussels, sashimi or sushi and pre-cooked, peeled prawns such as in prawn cocktails, sandwich fillings, and prawn salads
Cheese	Pre-packaged and delicatessen soft, semi-soft and surface ripened cheeses eg brie, camembert, ricotta, feta and blue
Ice cream	Soft serve
Other dairy products	Unpasteurised dairy products eg raw milk, raw milk cheeses or yoghurt made Pre-packaged and uncooked tofu

## Safer alternatives

Food type	Safer Alternative	Precautions
Cold Meats	Home cooked	Store in fridge & use within a day of cooking
Chicken	Home cooked Hot take-away chicken (whole, portions)	Ensure chicken is cooked thoroughly to 75°C, use immediately – store any leftovers in fridge and use within a day of cooking. Use immediately or store any leftovers in fridge and use within a day of purchase.
Salads	Freshly prepared salads – home made	Wash all vegetables and fruit thoroughly. Store any leftover prepared salads in fridge, use within a day of preparation
Seafood	All freshly cooked seafood	Use immediately – store any leftovers in fridge and use within a day of cooking
Cheese	Hard cheese eg cheddar, tasty Processed cheese, cheese spreads, plain cream cheese, plain cottage cheese	Store in fridge Purchase cheese packaged by manufacturer Store in the fridge
Other dairy products	Pasteurised dairy products eg custard, pasteurised milk yoghurt, dairy dessert Packaged frozen ice cream	Store in fridge, use by 'use by' date Maintain the ice cream frozen
Canned foods	All	Store unused portions in fridge in clean, sealed containers and use within a day
Tofu	Home cooked	Ensure tofu is cooked thoroughly to 75°C, use immediately – store any leftovers in fridge and use within a day of cooking Pre-packaged and uncooked tofu

There are no special rules for cooking for elderly people – 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 was written by Sarah Friedrich, OSCAR Care Group Food Safety Auditor & Trainer. Please call or email Sarah via our contact details below.



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