

# Immunocompromised Diet Guidelines



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

An immunocompromised diet is also called a low bacterial diet. This diet is used to help decrease the amount of bacteria a person who has a weakened immune system eats. This includes people who:

- Have genetic defects.
- Have infections, such as HIV and AIDS.
- Have certain cancers, such as leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma.
- Have cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy.
- Have end stage renal disease or who are on dialysis.
- Have diabetes that is not well controlled.
- Have cirrhosis.
- Take medicines, such as steroids or anti-rejection post-transplant medicines.
- Are pregnant.

You will need to follow general food safety guidelines and avoid some foods to reduce your risk of getting sick from food.

## General food safety guidelines

The list below highlights food safety guidelines to follow. For a full list of guidelines, ask for the handout, *Food Safety Guide*.

- **Wash your hands and surfaces often when handling food.**
  - Wash your hands using warm water and soap. Rub your hands together with good friction for at least 20 seconds.
  - Use clean dishcloths every day. Bacteria grow easily in dirty, wet dishcloths.
  - Avoid using sponges to clean dishes and utensils. Sponges can hold germs that contaminate food and dishes.
- **Do not cross contaminate.** Use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- **When preparing food:**
  - Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water with friction before peeling and cutting.
  - Cook foods to proper temperature. Use a food thermometer to test for doneness. Ask for the handout, *Food Safety Guide*, for more information.

- Keep hot foods hot (above 140 degrees Fahrenheit) and cold foods cold (below 41 degrees Fahrenheit).
- If a home or store bought canned food has a lid bulging, or if the food has any bad odors or looks strange after opening, throw it out!
- **Refrigerate foods right away.** Refrigerate only as much as can be eaten in 3 to 5 days. Freeze the rest within two hours of cooking!
- **Reheated foods should reach 165 degrees Fahrenheit or a rolling boil before being eaten.**
- **When storing food:**
  - Check expiration dates. Throw away foods older than their “use by” dates.
  - Throw away all prepared refrigerated foods after 4 to 5 days.
- **When in doubt, throw it out!**

## Eating guidelines by food group

### Milk and Dairy Products

Most dairy products sold in the grocery store are safe to eat.

#### Foods to AVOID:

- Moldy cheeses, like blue cheese and Gorgonzola.
- Probiotic yogurts, like Activia.
- Unpasteurized dairy and cheese products:
  - To tell if a dairy or cheese product is pasteurized, look at the food label. The label will either say “pasteurized” on it or the ingredient list will list “pasteurized milk” as an ingredient.
  - If you purchase items at a small, local dairy, ask if it is pasteurized.
  - If a dairy product is labeled as “raw” it most often means it is not pasteurized.

### Meat or Meat Substitutes

If your meat is cooked to the proper temperature, it is safe for you to eat.

#### Foods to AVOID:

- All raw or under cooked meats, seafood and eggs.
- Products containing raw or under cooked meats, seafood and eggs, such as sushi and homemade Caesar dressing.
- Raw or under cooked tofu sold in the refrigerated section.
  - Shelf stable tofu has been heat treated and is safe to eat without cooking.
- Refrigerated smoked seafood and pickled fish.
- Eggs with a runny yolk, such as over easy and poached eggs.
  - If you want to eat runny yolk eggs, you can purchase pasteurized in the shell eggs made by Davidson’s. They are called Davidson’s Safest Choice Pasteurized Eggs. To see if they are sold at any stores in your area, use their store locator available at [www.safeeggs.com/store-locator](http://www.safeeggs.com/store-locator).

- Deli meats, both pre-packaged and deli counter sliced meats, as well as hotdogs or sausages, unless heated to steaming before eating.

## **Fruits and Vegetables**

Most fruits and vegetables are safe for you to eat if you wash them well. Remember to also wash the skins of fruits that you peel.

### **To wash your fruits and vegetables:**

- First inspect them to make sure they have no bruises, holes in the skin or signs of insect damage.
- Then run them under running water and rub with friction for 20 seconds. For extra dirty fruits and vegetables, like melon and potatoes, you can scrub with a soft brush to remove dirt.
- You do not need to peel the fruit or vegetable after washing it unless you prefer it this way.

### **Foods to AVOID:**

- Unwashed fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs.
- Raw fruit with a rough texture, such as raspberries and strawberries.
- Unpasteurized fruit and vegetable juice.
- Restaurant or deli foods that contain raw fruits or vegetables. Pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables should also be avoided unless you rewash them before eating.
- Uncooked, raw nuts and roasted nuts in the shell.
- All vegetable sprouts.

## **Breads and Cereals**

Breads and cereals are safe for you to eat.

### **Foods to AVOID:**

- Products with uncooked brewer's yeast, like unpasteurized beer.
- Avoid contact with raw yeast. You can eat any foods made with it. You just do not want to knead or mix dough with raw yeast due to the risk of breathing in the raw yeast.

## **Water**

- Do not drink well water. Ask your doctor if city water is safe for you to drink.
- You will need to drink bottled water in the hospital.
- When choosing bottled water, make sure that it has been treated to be safe. Look for a water that has been reverse osmosis treated, distilled and filtered through an absolute 1 micron or smaller filter or "one micron absolute."
- If you are told to drink bottled water, you should also avoid fountain soda pop because it is mixed with water that is not bottled.

## **Other Foods to AVOID**

- Raw or unpasteurized honey.
- Avoid salad bars, buffets, bulk food bins in stores, food samples or snacks that are out in the open where others may touch them.
  - If you are going to a family function where the food will be set out “buffet style”, you can still eat. Try to be one of the first people though the line to make your plate.
- Unpasteurized miso products. Most commercial miso products are fine to eat.
- Yerba Mate tea.

**If you have questions or concerns about food safety or foods to avoid on this diet, please talk with your doctor or dietitian.**

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

The Library for Health Information is available to help you find more health information at (614) 293-3707 or e-mail: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).