Immunocompromised Diet for Cancer Patients

An immunocompromised (im-YOU-noh-KOM-pruh-mized) 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. When you have a weakened immune system, you are still able to eat most foods. **To reduce your risk of getting sick you should follow the general food safety guidelines listed in this handout.**

General Food Safety Guidelines

The list below highlights food safety guidelines to follow. For a full list of guidelines, ask for the patient education 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 can grow easily in dirty, wet dishcloths.
- Do not 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 that the food is done.
- 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. 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 you should not eat:
• Moldy and soft cheeses, such as blue, gorgonzola, brie, feta or 
queso.
• 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 you should not eat:
• All raw or under cooked meats, seafood and eggs.
• Products containing raw or under cooked meats, seafood or eggs 
(such as sushi, homemade Caesar dressing, cookie dough, egg nog 
or homemade mayonnaise).
• 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, ceviche, caviar, raw or 
cooked clams, oysters or mussels.
• Eggs with a runny yolk, such as over easy and poached eggs.
  ▶ If you want to eat runny yolk eggs, you can buy “pasteurized in the shell” eggs made by Davidson’s Safest Choice Pasteurized Eggs.

• 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. You should also wash the skins of the 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 you should not eat:**
• 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 (alfalfa, mung bean sprouts).

**Breads and Cereals**
Breads and cereals are safe for you to eat.

**You should not:**
• Eat or drink products with uncooked brewer’s yeast, like unpasteurized beer.

• Touch 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.

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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 you should not eat or drink:

- Raw or unpasteurized honey, juices or beers.
- 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 through the line to make your plate.
- Raw or unpasteurized miso products.
  - Most commercial miso products are fine to eat.
- Yerba Mate tea and sun tea.

If you have questions or concerns about your diet and food safety, talk to your doctor or dietitian.