Safe Foods from Home

Foods brought in for patients are okay and may even help with their treatment and recovery. There are some food safety guidelines that need to be followed to protect patients:

• Make sure that foods brought in are appropriate based on the diet ordered by the patient’s doctor. Check with the dietitian, diet technician or nurse to be sure.

• Foods should be properly packaged and stored.

• Small servings are best as they can be stored and heated easier. Also, the patient may not or be able to eat large amounts of food.

• Be sure food is reheated well. It is better to be too hot than not hot enough. Leftover foods should be reheated to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Make sure to stir foods cooked in a microwave before checking the temperature as reheated foods may warm up unevenly.

• Undercooked foods and some raw foods, such as sushi, are not safe to bring for patients.

Meals from home:

• Pack small servings in individual containers.

• Once frozen food is thawed, keep it only for 2 days.

• Only plan on reheating and not cooking foods at the hospital.

• Make sure meats and eggs are cooked thoroughly. Eggs should be cooked so there is no runny liquid.

• Leftovers should not be kept longer than 3 days after being prepared at home.

• Heat and eat leftovers only once. Throw away uneaten portions.

How do I safely bring foods from home or a restaurant?

If it is hot food, make sure it stays hot. If it is just warm when you arrive, reheat it in the microwave to steaming before eating. If you have a long distance to travel, cool the food down and bring it in a cooler and reheat it once you arrive.

If it is a cold food, make sure it is stays cold by using a cooler and ice.

Healthy choices for patients

Pre-packaged foods:

• Non-perishable, shelf stable or frozen, microwaveable meals

• Peanut butter or cheese crackers

• Pudding or applesauce

• Granola bars or crackers

• Canned soups that are ready to heat and eat

Please label food containers with:

• Patient’s name

• Patient’s room number

• Date food was brought in
Do NOT bring these foods

- Unpasteurized dairy foods
- Unpasturized fruit or vegetable juices
- Foods past expiration dates
- Foods from bulk bins, salad bars and buffets

Immunocompromised patients

People with weak immune systems have a higher risk of getting an infection and may have special food restrictions. These include:

- Patients getting chemotherapy
- Patients with HIV or AIDS
- Transplant patients
- Patients with a low white blood cell count

These patients are often on an immunocompromised diet and should not eat foods that may make them sick.

For more information about the immunocompromised diet, ask for these patient education handouts:

- Immunocompromised Diet Guidelines
- Immunocompromised Diet for Cancer Patients
- Immunocompromised Diet for BMT Patients

If you have any questions, please ask to speak with a dietitian.

Patients on an immunocompromised diet should NOT eat these foods

- Moldy cheeses
- Unpasteurized dairy products, juices, beer and honey
- Probiotic yogurts, like Activia (regular yogurts are okay)
- Undercooked meat, seafood and eggs and products containing them
- Refrigerated smoked seafood and pickled fish
- Eggs with a runny yolk, like over easy and poached
- Deli meats (both prepackaged and deli counter sliced) and hotdogs must be cooked to steaming before eating
- Unwashed fresh fruits and vegetables (most washed fruits and vegetables are okay)
- Uncooked fruits with a rough texture, like raspberries and strawberries
- Restaurant or deli foods containing raw fruits and vegetables
- Salad bars and buffets where the food is out in the open and others can touch
- Uncooked, raw nuts and roasted nuts in the shell
- All vegetable sprouts
- Well water
- Beverages from restaurants, convenience stores, and other locations unless they are in bottles or cans. Avoid fountain drinks, tap water or beverages made from tap water.

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.

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