

# Food Safety

Food safety is especially important if you have cancer. Some cancer treatments can weaken your immune system and leave you at increased risk for infection. If you eat food contaminated by bacteria, you can get food poisoning, also called foodborne illness, which can make you very sick. Safe food-handling practices can help reduce your risk of foodborne illness.

## Tips for Safe Food Preparation

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### General Food Safety Tips

- Always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparing food and before eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water between the preparation of raw meat, poultry, and seafood products and the preparation of any other food that will not be cooked.
- Once a cutting board touches raw meat, poultry, or fish, the board must be washed, either in a dishwasher or by hand washing it with hot, soapy water and rinsing it well. You may choose to sanitize your cutting board by rinsing it with a solution of 1 tablespoon bleach per 1 gallon of water. Rinse well and dry.
- Never thaw food at room temperature, such as on the countertop. It is safe to thaw food in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. If you thaw food in cold water or in the microwave, you should cook it right away.
- Refrigerate leftover food within 2 hours of cooking. If the room or air temperature is higher than 90° F, do not leave cooked food out for longer than 1 hour. Throw away food left unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours.
- Buy products before the “sell by” date.
- Like foods, herbal nutritional supplements can be contaminated with bacteria or other substances that can make you sick. To avoid this risk, do not take any supplements unless your health care team says they are safe for you.

### Fruits and Vegetables

- Rinse all fruits and vegetables under running water. This includes fruits and vegetables with skins or rinds that are not eaten.
- Firm-skinned fruits and vegetables should be rubbed by hand or scrubbed with a clean brush while rinsing them under running water.
- Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled “ready-to-eat,” “washed,” or “triple washed” should not be washed.
- Do not use soap or bleach to wash fresh fruits or vegetables. These products are not intended for consumption.



## Meat, Poultry, Fish, Milk, and Eggs

- Avoid raw, rare, and undercooked meats, poultry, fish, and eggs.
- Cook eggs until the yolks and whites are firm. Do not eat raw eggs.
- Choose only pasteurized milk and cheeses.
- Heat hot dogs, luncheon meats, and deli meats to steaming hot or 165° F. Avoid eating these foods cold or straight from the refrigerator.
- Use a cooking thermometer to check temperatures and make sure foods are cooked thoroughly, as shown here:

Food	Safe internal temperature
Beef, pork, veal, and lamb (steaks, roasts, chops)	145° F
Fish	145° F
Ground beef, pork, and lamb	160° F
Egg dishes	160° F
Turkey, chicken, and duck (whole pieces or ground)	165° F

## Food Safety Tips for Dining Out

- Check inspection scores for restaurants.  
Many state health departments have made restaurant health inspection scores available online. Check the score before going to the restaurant or check when you get there by looking for a sign displayed in the entrance or lobby.
- Look around the restaurant. Look for clean tables, floors, and eating utensils.
- Check that your food is cooked thoroughly.
  - Meat, fish, poultry, and eggs should be cooked well.
  - If food is served lukewarm, undercooked, or raw, do not eat it: Send it back.
- Handle your leftovers properly.
  - Taking your food to go? Remember to refrigerate it within 2 hours of takeout.
  - If food is left in a hot car or temperatures above 90° F, refrigerate it within 1 hour.
  - Eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days.

## Resources

### Cancer and Food Safety Resources:

American Cancer Society, “Food Safety During Cancer Treatment”: [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition/weak-immune-system.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition/weak-immune-system.html)

Cancer.net, “Food Safety During and After Cancer Treatment”: [www.cancer.net/survivorship/healthy-living/food-safety-during-and-after-cancer-treatment](http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/healthy-living/food-safety-during-and-after-cancer-treatment)

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), “Food Safety for Older Adults and People With Cancer, Diabetes, HIV/AIDS, Organ Transplants, and Autoimmune Diseases”: [www.fda.gov/food/people-risk-foodborne-illness/food-safety-older-adults-and-people-cancer-diabetes-hiv-aids-organ-transplants-and-autoimmune](http://www.fda.gov/food/people-risk-foodborne-illness/food-safety-older-adults-and-people-cancer-diabetes-hiv-aids-organ-transplants-and-autoimmune)

### General Food Safety Resources:

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: [www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety](http://www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/foodsafety](http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety)

FoodSafety.gov, federal food safety information (including information about recalls): [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

Partnership for Food Safety Education: [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org)

