

# BRINGING IN FOOD FROM HOME



**Peter Mac**  
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre  
Victoria Australia

**As an inpatient at Peter Mac, you may find family and friends will bring you home-made food during your stay. We have strict rules in place about food brought in from home to ensure all our patients and their food is of good quality and safe.**

## **Why are there rules about food brought from home?**

Food poisoning is always a serious issue but especially for:

- the elderly
- patients who have had surgery
- those with reduced immune function.

As well as being safe, food may need to meet other requirements such as:

- cultural needs
- religious needs
- medical requirements
- nutrition requirements
- allergy conditions.

The hospital menu has a wide variety of nutritious meal options and is your best options for meals during your hospital stay.

If you do choose to bring in any food from home, you or your family/carer will need to speak to the nurse. Your nurse will advise on:

- what food is allowed
- how it must be stored
- how much food you are allowed to bring
- that food must be eaten in a 24 hour period, after this time it will be thrown out.

It is important to remember **not** to share your food with other patients. Other patients may have different nutrition, cultural and religious needs or food allergies.

## **Is there a safe way to transport food?**

Yes. How you transport food from home to the hospital is very important. You must always:

- wash your hands before and after handling food
- make sure food is carried in an 'esky' or other type of 'chiller' container
- for hot food, make sure the food is kept hot until eaten

We do not recommend you transport food from home when travelling long distances. Long distance travel makes it hard to keep food at a temperature that is safe for eating.

## **What foods are unsafe to bring in from home?**

There are some foods that are unsafe to bring from home. We call these 'high risk' foods.

To reduce any chances of risk, we do not allow the following foods from home:

- seafood and chicken that is not cooked properly
- eggs that have runny yolks (yellow centre)
- soft cheeses and deli meats like salami
- cream filled cakes and other sweets
- packaged sandwiches from supermarkets and take away shops
- cooked, cold rice
- packaged salads and fruit salad from supermarkets and take away shops
- yoghurts containing probiotics addition of live cultures

## **Is there a safe way to store food from home when in hospital?**

Yes. To make sure your food from home is stored correctly in the fridge and always safe to eat, we ask that all food is covered or in a well-sealed container.

All food containers must have a label that shows the following:

- patient name
- date the food was made or cooked
- the date/time it was placed in the fridge.

Single food items you have purchased from a shop, such as a yoghurt or crème fraiche, also need labels. Make sure the label does not cover the 'expiry, use by or best eaten by' date that is on the packet/container.

No food or containers that are open or damaged can be stored in the fridge. Plastic bags are not to be used to store food.

## **What foods are safe to store in your room?**

There are some foods that are safe to store in your room. These foods are called 'shelf-stable' which means they are pre-packed and do not require refrigeration.

These foods include the following:

- packaged nuts, dry crackers
- well washed raw fruit, canned fruit
- breads, bagels, rolls, muffins
- pretzels, popcorn, chips
- bottled or canned drinks
- sweet biscuits, energy bars, chocolate or lollies.

## **Are left-over foods from your patient meal tray okay to store?**

No. After eating your meal, all left-over food on your patient meal tray must be left on the tray. It is not to be placed in the fridge for later.

Any uneaten food on your meal tray will be returned to the kitchen where it is thrown out. You can always order more snacks if you become thirsty or hungry.

### Is it okay to reheat home-made food?

If home-made food is brought in hot, it is best eaten while it is hot.

If you wish to put it away for later, you must consume it within 24 hours. It can be reheated, once only, until it is scorching hot.

If food is cold and it has not been heated before you can:

- use the ward microwave to heat the food
- when microwaving food, it must be heated to a point of steaming or boiling to kill any harmful bacteria
- only reheat the food once.

### How do the Patient Service Assistants (PSAs) help?

Our PSAs play a very important role to make sure everyone follows our food safety rules. They monitor all fridges and the food stored inside. Our PSAs will:

- check and clean the ward fridge every day
- throw away any food that has passed its 'best before' or 'use by' date
- remove and throw away any food that is not labelled or labelled correctly
- wash any non-disposable containers, such as Tupperware, and return to the patient.



### For more information about food safety

If you would like more information about food safety or food standards please visit:

- **Victoria's Department of Health**  
[www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety)  
or email them on:  
[www.foodsafety@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:www.foodsafety@health.vic.gov.au)
- **Food Standards Australia New Zealand**  
[www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)
- **Food Safety Information Council**  
[www.foodsafety.asn.au](http://www.foodsafety.asn.au)
- **Queensland Health resource**  
[www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/resources/oncol\\_safeeating.pdfresources/oncol\\_safeeating.pdf](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/resources/oncol_safeeating.pdfresources/oncol_safeeating.pdf)