

FOOD RISK AND YOU

What to eat with a weakened immune system

Food safety is important for everyone. It becomes especially important for people with severe illness or health conditions affecting their immune system, or who are taking medications that can suppress the immune system. People over 65 can also expect their immune system to weaken with age and need to be more aware of riskier food choices.

You can reduce the risk of getting sick from food by choosing and preparing food safely. Below are common food risks – and how to avoid them.

Fruits and vegetables

Food	Form	Risk	How to reduce the risk
SALADS	Home-made	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wash salad ingredients well just before making and eating.Store any leftover salads in the fridge and use within 1 day of preparation.
	Store bought salads, including fruit salad	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not eat pre-made salads from salad bars and smorgasbords.Follow the “wash before use” instructions for bagged salads.
FRUIT	Whole fresh fruits	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wash well before eating.If making cut fruit dishes, such as fruit salad, keep the shelf life short, no more than 2 days.
	Rockmelons	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not buy bruised or damaged melons.If buying cut melon, ensure it has been kept cold.Wash hands well before and after handling fresh rockmelons.Use a clean cutting board that is not used for raw meat or poultry.Refrigerate within 2 hours of peeling or cutting.Throw away leftovers if left at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
VEGGIES AND HERBS	Fresh vegetables and herbs	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wash well just before eating or cooking.
	Frozen vegetables	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Always cook and follow packet instructions.Never add raw frozen vegetables to salads.
BEAN SPROUTS	All sprouts, such as alfalfa, broccoli, onion, sunflower, clover, radish, snowpea, mung beans and soybean	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Never eat raw or lightly cooked sprouts, and do not add as garnishes.Always cook before eating.

Meat, poultry and seafood

Food	Form	Risk	How to reduce the risk
SLICED DELI MEAT	Ham, salami, luncheon meat, chicken meat	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat unless thoroughly cooked to at least 75°C (for example, on a cooked pizza, or in a ham and cheese toasted sandwich) and eaten soon afterwards. • A safer option is packaged sliced meats - follow the label shelf-life instructions. Eat within 5 days of opening, even if shelf life has not yet been reached.
RAW MEAT	Any raw meat, for example poultry, beef, pork, lamb	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat raw meat.
COOKED MEATS	Beef, pork, mince	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook thoroughly to at least 71°C (medium) and eat while hot.
POULTRY	Home-cooked	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure chicken is cooked thoroughly to at least 74°C (juices must run clear) and eat while hot. • Store any leftovers in fridge and reheat until steaming hot (at least 60°C). • Use within 3 days of cooking.
	Hot takeaway chicken	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase freshly cooked and eat while hot. • Store leftovers in fridge and reheat until steaming hot (at least 60°C). • Use leftovers within 3 days.
	Cold chicken or turkey used in sandwich bars	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat cold chicken or turkey used in sandwich bars. • A safer option is home-cooked chicken that has been cooled in the fridge and eaten within 3 days.
	Stuffing (poultry)	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat unless cooked separately and eaten hot. • Ensure stuffing is cooked thoroughly.
PATE	Refrigerated pâté or meat spreads	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat refrigerated pâté or meat spreads. • Canned pâté or meat spreads are safer options. Refrigerate after opening and follow the label instructions for shelf life after opening.
SEAFOOD	Raw seafood	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat raw seafood.
	Chilled cooked prawns	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat chilled cooked prawns. • A safer option is to purchase raw prawns (including frozen ones from the supermarket) to cook at home. Chill immediately after cooking thoroughly and eat within 2 days.
	Cooked fish and seafood	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook thoroughly to at least 63°C and eat while hot. • Store leftovers in the fridge and reheat until steaming hot (at least 60°C). • Use leftovers within 1 day.
SUSHI	Store bought	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat store bought pre-made sushi. • A safer option is to purchase freshly-made sushi (no raw fish) and consume within 4 hours.
	Home-made	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not use raw meat or raw seafood in home-made sushi. • Eat home-made sushi immediately.

Dairy and eggs

Food	Form	Risk	How to reduce the risk
CHEESE	Hard cheese, such as cheddar, tasty cheese	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Store in the fridge.
	Processed cheese, such as cheese spreads, cottage cheese, cream cheese	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Store in the fridge and eat within 2 days of opening pack.
	Soft and semi-soft cheese, such as brie, camembert, ricotta, fetta, bocconcini and blue	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not eat unless thoroughly cooked to at least 75°C (for example, on cooked pizza, or in a cooked pasta sauce) and eaten soon afterwards. Purchase commercially-packaged items in small amounts. Open promptly after purchase and eat in one sitting. Never leave out of the fridge for more than 2 hours.
ICE-CREAM	Packaged frozen ice-cream	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep and eat frozen.
	Soft serve	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not eat soft serve ice cream.
	Fried ice-cream	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not eat fried ice cream.
DAIRY	Unpasteurised (raw)	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not drink or use.
	Pasteurised, such as milk, cream, yoghurt	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check 'best before' or 'use-by' date. Follow storage instructions.
CUSTARD	Store bought	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be eaten cold if freshly opened. Store in fridge use within a day of opening. Reheat leftovers until steaming hot (at least 60°C). Check 'best before' or 'use-by' date.
	Home-made	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cook thoroughly to at least 71°C and eat while hot. Store in the fridge. Use within 1 day of making and reheat leftovers until steaming hot (at least 60°C).
EGGS	In store bought non-refrigerated products, such as mayonnaise and aioli	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check 'best before' or 'use-by' date. Follow storage instructions.
	Cooked egg dishes, such as fried eggs, scrambled eggs, quiche	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cook thoroughly to at least 71°C - until the white is set and the yolk has started to thicken. Do not use cracked or dirty eggs. Store eggs in their carton in the fridge. Follow the best before date on the carton. Wash hands well before and after handling eggs.
	Raw egg in food, for example home-made mayonnaise, aioli, chocolate mousse, cake batter, pancake batter	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not eat food containing raw egg.

Other foods

Food	Form	Risk	How to reduce the risk
LEFTOVERS	Cooked foods	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store leftovers covered in the fridge. • Eat within 3 days. • Always reheat until steaming hot (at least 60°C).
	Cooked rice and pasta	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cool quickly and store in the fridge as soon as it has stopped steaming. • Eat within 2 days and only reheat once - throw away any leftovers. • Leftovers can be frozen. Defrost in the fridge or microwave as needed.
OPENED CANNED FOODS	Tinned fruit, vegetables, fish	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store unused portions in the fridge in clean, sealed containers. • Use within 3 days. • Follow the pack instructions for storage after opening.
HUMMUS, TAHINI AND ANY OTHER SESAME PASTE	Store bought or home-made	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat hummus, tahini or any other sesame paste.
SOY	All soy products, such as tofu, soy milk, soy yoghurt	LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check 'best before' or 'use-by' date. Follow storage instructions.
SANDWICHES	Pre-prepared or pre-packaged sandwiches or wraps	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not eat pre-prepared or packaged sandwiches. • A safer option is freshly made sandwiches - be careful with filling choices.

This resource was created through a collaborative effort with NSW Health.



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FOOD SAFETY

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