

Guidelines for bringing occasional food to patients



Remember:

- Check with the dietitian, nurse, midwife or speech pathologist first
- Always wash your hands
- Keep hot food hot and cold food cold
- Only reheat food once
- Check food is within the use-by date
- If in doubt throw it out!

Nutritious food for good health

NSW Health is committed to providing high quality, safe, nutritious and appetising meals in all our hospitals. Providing nutritious food is an important part of caring for our patients.

Hospitals can provide specialised diets for religious and dietary requirements, such as halal, kosher and vegetarian menus, as well as for specific health needs, such as meals for people with diabetes, food allergies or swallowing problems.

Bringing food to your family and friends

A well balanced menu is provided in hospital. Bringing in food for hospital patients is not encouraged.

The hospital cannot accept responsibility for storing, heating or serving any food prepared outside its catering facilities as it may not meet the required food standards code.

If you do bring food into hospital for a patient there are important guidelines to follow to ensure it is safe and suitable.

Please check first with the dietitian, nurse, midwife or speech pathologist.

The food and drink that a patient normally consumes at home may not be safe for them while they are in hospital. The patient may not be able to eat or drink anything for a period of time or they may have been placed on a special diet.

Hospital food meets stringent food safety regulations. If you bring food into hospital, it is important to prepare, store and transport it safely to ensure it is free from harmful bacteria.

Keeping food safe

Preparing food

- ALWAYS wash your hands before handling food
- Keep raw foods (eg raw meat, poultry and fish) and ready to eat food separate to avoid contamination
- Cook food thoroughly; ensure meat and poultry is cooked until the juices run clear and there is no pink in the centre
- Keep kitchen utensils such as knives, saucepans and chopping boards clean
- Do not prepare food too far in advance
- Do not prepare food for hospital patients if you are unwell.

Keep cold food cold

Harmful bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels between 5°C and 60°C so it is essential that all hot and cold food items are stored and transported at the correct temperature.

Cold food should be stored at 5°C or less. If a cold food item has been left out of the fridge for two or more hours it should be thrown away. Keep cold food in an insulated container with an ice brick to ensure it stays cold on the way to hospital.



Serve hot food hot

Hot foods must be cooked to 70°C or more to kill harmful bacteria and then eaten within four hours. Cooked food must be kept steaming hot during transport in a thermos or insulated container. Hot food may be difficult to keep hot during transport.

An alternative is to ensure that hot food is cooled quickly after cooking in the home by putting it straight in the fridge or freezer. Never leave hot food to cool on the kitchen bench.

Where possible, the food can then be reheated in hospital. When reheating food make sure it is completely heated to steaming hot. Do not reheat food more than once. Ask the nurse or midwife about reheating food at hospital.

Not all food is suitable for hospital patients

Some types of food are more likely to carry harmful bacteria than others. See the following handy lists of suitable and unsuitable foods.

Safe foods

- Chips, popcorn and pretzels
- Biscuits, crackers and fresh bread
- Muesli bars, lollies and chocolate
- Dried or whole washed fresh fruit
- Plain cakes or muffins (no cream or custard filling or cream cheese icing)
- Bottled and canned drinks, tea and coffee
- Spreads (such as jam or honey)
- Canned or packaged foods.



Unsafe foods

- Homemade mayonnaise
- Raw mushrooms and sprouts
- Raw meat, seafood and eggs
- Cooked cold rice, including sushi
- Pre-sliced deli meats (such as ham)
- Salads, fruit salads and sandwiches purchased from a shop
- Soft serve ice cream and soft serve frozen yoghurt
- Soft cheeses (camembert, ricotta, fetta and blue-vein)
- Unpasteurised dairy products (raw milk or yoghurt and Roquefort cheese).



Storing food in hospital

It is best if the patient can eat the food straight away. If you need to store food for a short time, please ask your nurse, midwife or speech pathologist if a fridge is available. If food can be stored in the fridge, it must be placed in an air tight container and marked with the patient's name, bed number and date. Food items must not be kept for more than 24 hours.

Pre-packaged food items that have been opened, such as biscuits, cakes and crackers, must also be stored in an airtight container marked with the patient's name.