



# IT'S YOUR HEALTH

*This article was produced in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada.*

## Food Safety for Older Adults

### The Issue

As we age, it becomes harder for our immune system to fight infections. This means that older adults can become seriously ill if they eat contaminated food.

If you are over the age of 60, you should take extra care when handling, storing, and preparing food. You should also avoid consuming certain high-risk foods.

### Increased Risk for Older Adults

By the time you reach the age of 60, your immune system has started to weaken as part of the aging process. This means that it is more difficult to fight the infections caused by contaminated food. Aging also increases your risk of having chronic diseases, such as diabetes and kidney disease. These medical conditions can also increase your risk of suffering serious health effects from contaminated food.

### Foodborne Illnesses that Pose Higher Risks to Older Adults

The following types of foodborne illnesses are particularly dangerous for older adults:

**Listeria infection** is caused by bacteria that may be found in a wide variety of refrigerated, ready-to-eat foods, such as dairy products, cold cuts, and hot dogs.

**E. coli O157:H7** infection is caused by bacteria that may be found in foods such as raw and undercooked ground beef, unpasteurized fruit juice/cider, sprouts, and unpasteurized dairy products.

**Vibrio infection** is caused by bacteria that may be found in raw and undercooked shellfish, such as oysters, clams, and mussels.

**Salmonella infection** is caused by bacteria that may be found in a wide variety of foods but especially in raw and undercooked chicken, raw eggs, and raw milk.

### Minimizing Your Risk

For older adults, some foods can be more risky to eat because of the way they are produced, and the conditions and length of time they are stored. Older adults can minimize their chances of contracting a foodborne illness by avoiding some types of food. The following chart can help you make alternate choices when selecting food.



## Select the Safer Alternative

(Always refer to the [Internal Cooking Temperatures Chart](#).)

### Type of Food

---

Hot dogs

#### **Food to Avoid**

Hot dogs straight from the package without further heating.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Hot dogs thoroughly cooked to a safe internal temperature. The middle of the hot dog should be steaming hot or 74°C (165°F)

**Tip:** To help prevent foodborne illness, avoid spreading fluid from packages onto other food, cutting boards, utensils, dishes and food preparation surfaces. Wash your hands after handling hot dogs.

### Type of Food

---

Deli meats

#### **Food to Avoid**

Non-dried deli meats, such as bologna, roast beef and turkey breast.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Dried and salted deli meats such as salami and pepperoni.  
Non-dried deli meats heated throughout to steaming hot.

### Type of Food

---

Egg and egg products

#### **Food to Avoid**

Raw or lightly cooked egg or egg products, including salad dressings, cookie dough or cake batter sauces, and drinks such as homemade eggnog.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Egg dishes thoroughly cooked to a safe internal temperature. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.

Homemade eggnog must be heated to 71°C (160°F).

**Tip:** Pasteurized egg products can be used when making uncooked food that calls for raw eggs.

### Type of Food

---

Meat and poultry

#### **Food to Avoid**

Raw or undercooked meat or poultry, such as steak tartare.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Meat and poultry cooked to a safe internal temperature. (refer to the [Internal Cooking Temperatures Chart](#))

**Tip:** To help prevent foodborne illness, remember to use a digital food thermometer to check the internal temperature.

### Type of Food

---

Seafood

#### **Food to Avoid**

Raw seafood, such as sushi.

Raw oysters, clams, and mussels.

Refrigerated, smoked seafood.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Seafood cooked to a safe internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).

Cook until the shell has opened.

Smoked seafood in cans that do not require refrigeration until after opening.

**Tip:** Refrigerated smoked seafood can be eaten safely when fully cooked to a safe internal temperature, such as in a casserole.

### Type of Food

---

Dairy products

#### **Food to Avoid**

Raw or unpasteurized dairy products, including soft and semi-soft cheese, such as Brie, Camembert and blue-veined cheese.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Pasteurized dairy products, hard cheeses such as Colby, Cheddar, Swiss, and Parmesan.

### Type of Food

---

#### **Sprouts**

#### **Food to Avoid**

Raw sprouts such as alfalfa, clover, radish, and mung beans.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Thoroughly cooked sprouts.

### Type of Food

---

Pâtés and meat spreads

#### **Food to Avoid**

Refrigerated pâtés and meat spreads.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Pâtés and meat spreads sold in cans or those that do not require refrigeration until after opening.

### Type of Food

---

Fruit juice and cider

#### **Food to Avoid**

Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider.

#### **Safer Alternative**

Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider brought to a rolling boil and cooled.  
Pasteurized fruit juice and cider.

In addition, there are four basic safety steps you should always follow when handling, storing, preparing, and shopping for food:

**Separate:** Make sure to always separate your raw foods, such as meat and eggs, from cooked foods, fruits, and vegetables to avoid cross-contamination.

**Clean:** Wash your hands, kitchen surfaces, utensils, and reusable shopping bags often with warm, soapy water to eliminate bacteria and reduce your risk of foodborne illness.



**Chill:** Always refrigerate food and leftovers promptly at 4°C or below.

**Cook:** Always cook food to the safe internal temperatures. Health Canada recommends that you check this by using a digital food thermometer. Cooked foods are safe to eat when internal temperatures are:



# IT'S YOUR HEALTH



- 71° C (160° F) for ground meat (beef, veal, lamb and pork)
- 74° C (165° F) for leftover food, and boned and deboned poultry parts
- 85° C (185° F) for whole poultry

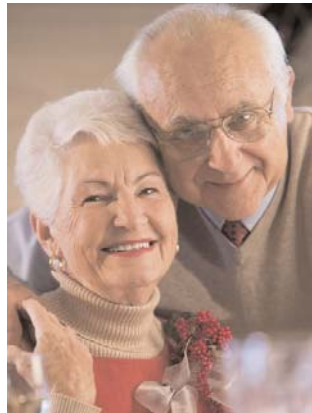
Also, it is strongly suggested that you pay attention to food recalls and learn more about food safety. The Need More Info? section below lists resources with many more tips on safe food practices. For example, there is a link to charts on the proper internal temperatures for cooked meats, poultry and seafood and on the length of time you can store various food items safely in your fridge and freezer.

## Background

It is estimated that there are approximately 11 million cases of foodborne illnesses in Canada every year. Foodborne illness, often called food poisoning, occurs when you eat food contaminated with disease-causing organisms, such as bacteria, viruses and parasites.

The most common symptoms of foodborne illness include stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, and fever.

Depending on the type of bacteria, virus or parasite, these symptoms can begin a few hours after eating



contaminated food, or can be delayed by several days, or even weeks. Most people affected by foodborne illnesses recover completely; some, however, suffer more serious health effects, including such conditions as brain infections and blood poisoning, which, in rare cases, could be fatal.

The risk of serious health effects after eating contaminated food depends on a number of factors:

- your age, general health status, and ability to fight disease; and
- the type and amount of bacteria, viruses, or parasites in the food you eat.

## The Government of Canada's Role

Several federal agencies work in partnership to safeguard Canada's food safety. Health Canada sets policies and standards governing the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) enforces the policies and ensures that necessary warnings are released quickly to the Canadian public.

As a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, Health Canada also participates in public awareness campaigns on safe food practices. An example is the FightBAC!@ program, which encourages consumers to think of food safety at every step of the food handling process, from shopping for groceries to reheating leftovers.

In addition, the Division of Aging and Seniors, Public Health Agency of Canada, provides federal leadership on health issues related to aging and seniors. The Division serves as a focal point for information and a centre of expertise in this area.

## Need More Info?

- See Health Canada's web section on **Food-Related Illnesses** at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/ill-intox/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/ill-intox/index-eng.php)
- Visit the Health Canada **In Your Kitchen: Safety Tips** section for tips on how to safely handle, prepare and cook your food at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/kitchen-cuisine/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/kitchen-cuisine/index-eng.php)
- For **FightBAC®** tips and Food Safety Brochures, please visit the **Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education** at: [www.canfightbac.org/cpcfse/en/](http://www.canfightbac.org/cpcfse/en/)

This site has handy **charts on safe cooking temperatures and safe cold storage** at:

[www.canfightbac.org/en/cookwell/charts/](http://www.canfightbac.org/en/cookwell/charts/) and a **Food Safety for Older Adults** guide at [www.canfightbac.org/cpcfse/en/\\_pdf/fs\\_adults.pdf](http://www.canfightbac.org/cpcfse/en/_pdf/fs_adults.pdf)

- Go to the *It's Your Health* web section on **Food and Nutrition** at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/index-eng.php) for many articles on food safety.
- See the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's web section on **Common Causes of Foodborne Illness**, at: [www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/causee.shtml](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/causee.shtml)
- Visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's web section on **Food Recalls and Allergy Alerts**, at: [www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpar/recarapp/recaltoce.shtml](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpar/recarapp/recaltoce.shtml)

- Also, visit the **Division of Aging and Seniors, Public Health Agency of Canada** at: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/index-eng.php)
- For additional articles on health and safety issues, please check out the ***It's Your Health*** web section at: [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh)

You can also call toll-free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-276-1245\*.