Bringing food into hospital

Food Service & Nutrition Department

Information for patients, families and friends

Can I bring food in for patients?
You can bring food into our facilities as long as it is safe. There can be a risk of food poisoning when food is not properly prepared, transported or stored. This can have serious consequences for the patient.

As well as being safe, food must meet the patient’s requirements in regards to their cultural/religious preferences and medical/nutritional needs including food allergies.

Speak to your nursing staff, dietitian or treating medical team if you plan to bring food in. Do not offer to share food with other patients or residents.

If you plan to bring food in, talk to your healthcare team first

What is food poisoning?
Food poisoning is caused by eating food that contains harmful levels of certain bacteria or toxins. This can occur if food is not handled safely during preparation, cooking, storage, transport or serving.

It can be very serious for the elderly, pregnant women, people recovering from illness or for those with a suppressed immune system.

Symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fever, headache and muscle pains.

What food is safe to bring in for patients?
- Dry biscuits
- Sweet biscuits
- Pretzels, potato chips
- Muesli bars
- Washed fresh fruit or dried fruit
- Baked products e.g. bread, bagels, muffins, plain cakes, scones
- Lollies and chocolates
- Soft drinks, cordial, tea bags, powdered hot chocolate

Find out how to safely prepare, store and transport food you are bringing on the next page
What food is potentially unsafe to bring in for patients?

- Any food that can spoil if not kept refrigerated
- Meat and poultry either cooked or raw
- Seafood
- Prepared rice and pasta dishes
- Soft cheeses, deli meats
- Salads and other items containing dairy products or creamy dressings (e.g. coleslaw)
- Sweet dishes and cakes which contain custard, cream or made from uncooked eggs
- Casseroles, soups and sauces
- Sandwiches with potentially hazardous food fillings (e.g. meat, fish, poultry, cheese)

Safe food preparation and transport guidelines

- Always maintain personal hygiene and wash hands prior to handling food.
- All potentially unsafe food must be transported to the facility in an ‘esky’ or ‘chiller’ type container
- If your food is transported hot, you must ensure that it is kept hot until eaten. Transporting hot food long distances is not recommended due to difficulty keeping it hot.

Safe food storage and reheating guidelines

- Any food which is not going to be consumed immediately must be covered and labelled with the patient’s name, date of birth and UR/patient number as well as the date and time the food was brought into the hospital. Food requiring refrigeration must be refrigerated within 15 minutes of arrival. Labels and the location of the refrigerator are available from nursing staff.
- All potentially unsafe food that is stored in the fridge and not consumed within 24 hours will be discarded by support services staff at 9am daily. Signage regarding this process is displayed on all fridges. Any food without the correct labelling will also be discarded.
- Food requiring reheating must be reheated thoroughly so that it is steaming or boiling (or in accordance with the manufacturer’s heating instructions) to ensure it reaches a minimum 75ºC.
- Food that has already been reheated once must never be reheated again.