

Food Safety

Between 5 to 5.4 million Australian's suffer from foodborne illness every year!

We spend more money on food than on any other goods and services. On average, households purchase \$127 of food per week - of which \$34 is spent on meals prepared outside the home (ABS 1998-1999).

How do we know that the food we purchase is safe to eat? While government regulations are designed to ensure that you are supplied with safe food, there are still things you can do to ensure that the food you purchase is safe and that you keep it safe.

Food premises

Take care when choosing where you buy or eat food. Ask yourself the following and if you answer 'no' to any of these questions it could signal that the operators are not handling foods appropriately and there may be potential food safety problems.



- Are foods that require refrigeration adequately refrigerated and cold to the touch?
- Are foods kept or served steaming hot?
- If you can see food being prepared, are precautions taken to prevent cross contamination of food?
- Are raw and cooked foods kept separate at all times during preparation and display?
- Do staff use tongs or gloves when handling food and do you see them use separate tongs for different foods?
- Is there a handwashing basin? Do staff wash their hands well with warm soapy water between tasks?
- Are the areas you can see clean and tidy? Food preparation, such as cutting up meat and preparing dishes for the salad bar, may take place in areas you can't see. Dirty staff and conditions in public areas may be a clue that things are worse behind the scenes.



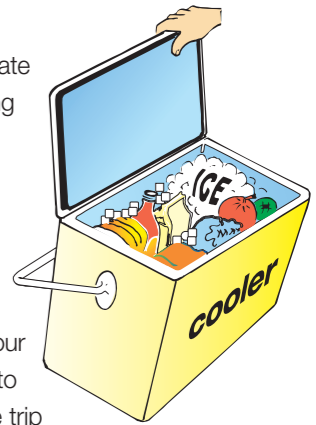
What to look for when shopping

Don't buy...

- Food from damaged packaging. Examples include dented or swollen cans, leaking containers, and packages with broken or imperfectly formed seals.
- Cracked eggs.
- Any product which may have been tampered with (eg broken safety seal).
- Food which is spoiled, such as mouldy or discoloured product. Spoilage microorganisms need to grow to high numbers to produce spoilage. If they can grow, pathogens or food poisoning bacteria can too!
- Food which is past the 'use by date'. Food may still look, smell and taste OK after this date, but it may also contain dangerous numbers of pathogens and hence unsuitable for health and safety reasons.
- Chilled or frozen food which is not chilled or frozen. These products need to be kept at low temperatures to minimise pathogen growth. Touch the packaging, particularly in supermarket fridges and freezers to determine whether they are still hard and cold.
- Chilled or frozen food stacked high in cabinets. Look for the maximum load indication line. Avoid food packed beyond the load line.
- Food in deli counters which could be cross contaminated. This can be because ready-to-eat food is in contact with raw food or where staff at the deli counter do not use separate tongs or change gloves between handling raw and ready-to-eat foods.

Tips for safe shopping

- Shop for non-perishable food first. Shop last for cold food and hot food.
- Keep hot food separate from frozen and chilled products in your shopping trolley and car. Place chilled and frozen food together on the conveyor belt to encourage the checkout operator to pack these items together.
- Put raw meats into separate plastic bags before placing them into the trolley to prevent meat juices from leaking into other products.
- If you have to travel for over 30 minutes, place your chilled and frozen food into an insulated cooler for the trip home, and avoid buying hot food.
- When you arrive home, immediately pack chilled, frozen, and hot cooked food into the refrigerator or freezer.



Eating out

All cooked food that has not been chilled, such as food in hot food cabinets (bain maries), takeaway and home-delivered food, should be kept steaming hot. Chilled food should be displayed in correctly operating refrigerated cabinets or on ice.

Certain foods, such as minced meat, sausages, hamburger patties, rolled or stuffed roasts, and poultry must be cooked right through. There should be no pink meat and juices should run clear. If you have to send undercooked product back, always ask for fresh accompaniments such as vegetables, as juices from the undercooked products could have contaminated these. Steaks, chops and whole roasts can be cooked to your preference. Steak tartare, rare hamburgers and carpaccio may be fashionable, but they are also very high risk!

Self-service and salad bars

Self-service salad/dessert bars in supermarkets and restaurants are popular. Nevertheless, there are some food safety issues to keep in mind...

- Hot food should ideally be served steaming hot, in hot food displays or over burners. However, in a buffet situation short periods of time at room temperature are acceptable.



- Chilled food should be kept chilled, either in refrigerated cabinets or on ice. Once again short periods at room temperature are acceptable.
- Fresh food should be brought out regularly, and it should not be combined with the leftovers from the food being replaced.
- Each salad or dessert should have its own utensil. Use the one that is allocated to the item and don't mix the serving utensils. Hold the utensils by the handle and, when replacing, ensure that the handle does not come into contact with the food.
- Never touch or taste food on display. If you see anyone doing this, report it to a staff member.
- Food should be protected from coughs and sneezes by a guard – usually a clear plastic cover extending over the food.

Buying lunches

- Pre-made sandwiches and rolls containing perishable ingredients, such as soft cheeses and meats, should preferably be stored under refrigeration, or otherwise at cooler room temperatures for no more than about four hours. Do not buy 'tired-looking' products, as they may have been at room temperature for too long.
- Food in hot display cabinets should be steaming hot. Avoid purchasing food that is stacked too high in hot display cabinets. Return lukewarm pies and other filled products to the shop.
- Minced meats, such as hamburgers and sausages, and chickens should be cooked right through.
- Food from take-away outlets should be eaten within a few hours.

One final point....

If you are not happy with the food safety aspects of a supermarket, restaurant or takeaway, explain this to the management. You may also want to contact your state health department, food authority or local council.



For further information go to our web site
www.safefood.net.au

Endorsed by the Food Safety Centre
www.foodsafetycentre.com.au



Food Safety when buying food



Shopping * Eating out * Take away