



FEATURE ARTICLE FROM ALWAYS BEST CARE

How Seniors Can Protect Themselves from Food Related Illness

Every year, one in six Americans suffers food poisoning and about 3,000 die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention . While healthy diets are certainly beneficial and help prevent disease and improve mental and physical abilities, seniors should avoid some foods that appear healthy, especially raw foods, because of the germs that are in the food. As we age, it is harder for our bodies to fight off germs, making it easier to get sick. Having diabetes, kidney disease, or treatments from cancer also add to the risk of food-borne illnesses.

The [Food and Drug Administration](#) recommends seniors avoid these foods:

- Raw fish
- Raw shellfish, such as oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops
- Raw meat or poultry
- Raw or unpasteurized milk or cheese
- Soft cheeses such as feta, brie, blue, and Mexican-style
- Raw or lightly cooked eggs or egg products, such as salad dressings, cookie dough, cake batter, sauces, and drinks such as eggnog
- Raw sprouts
- Unpasteurized or untreated juice from fruits and veggies. In the U.S. almost all juice is treated to kill germs. This makes it safe to drink. The FDA requires a warning label on all juices that have not been treated. The label says: *WARNING: This product has not been pasteurized and therefore may contain harmful bacteria that can cause serious illness in children, the elderly, and persons with a weak immune system.*

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) adds this:

- Do not eat hot dogs, luncheon meats, or deli meats, unless they are reheated until steaming hot.
- Avoid getting fluid from hot dog packages on other foods, utensils, and food preparation surfaces, and wash hands after handling hot dogs, luncheon meats, and deli meats.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pâtés and meat spreads may be eaten.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood, unless it is contained in a cooked dish, such as a casserole. Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, or mackerel, is most often labeled as "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky." The fish is found in the refrigerator section or sold at deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens. Canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood may be eaten.

Why refrigerator maintenance is a priority

Reducing the risk that your body will be introduced to harmful germs also begins in your refrigerator. Listeriosis is an infection and a form of food poisoning caused by eating contaminated food with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* which grows on food at refrigerator temperatures. People affected by listeriosis experience symptoms such as fever, muscle aches, and sometimes nausea or diarrhea. The

infection can spread to the nervous system, causing headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions. Obviously, at that stage, listeriosis puts seniors even more at risk for falling.

In the United States, an estimated 1,600 persons become seriously ill and 260 die with listeriosis each year. Even with prompt treatment of antibiotics, some infections result in death. This is particularly likely in the elderly and in persons with other serious medical problems.

The good news is consumers can reduce their risk for listeriosis quite easily in three easy steps as outlined by the Food and Drug Administration.

<p>Chill... ...at the Right Temperature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your refrigerator should register at 40°F (4°C) or below and the freezer at 0°F (-18°C). Place a refrigerator thermometer in the refrigerator, and check the temperature periodically. Adjust the refrigerator temperature control, if necessary. Place a second thermometer in the freezer. 	<p>Use... ...Ready-to-Eat Foods ASAP!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use ready-to-eat, refrigerated foods <i>as soon as possible</i>. The longer they're stored in the refrigerator, the more chance <i>Listeria</i> has to grow. 	<p>Clean... ...the Refrigerator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean your refrigerator regularly. Wipe up spills immediately. This is particularly important, so <i>Listeria</i> doesn't have a place to grow and then spread to other foods. Clean the inside walls and shelves with hot water and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent; then rise. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.
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Other measures you can take to avoid listeriosis:

- Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources, such as beef, pork, or poultry.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from other foods.
- Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.
- Consume perishable and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.

Given a senior's naturally lowered ability to fight off infection, seniors, their families, and caregivers should take these preventive measures to avoid germs in food and contracting food poisoning. Pay attention to the foods that are eaten, how food is prepared, and properly maintain the food in the refrigerator, and you may avoid an illness that causes great discomfort and weakening of the body.

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