

FOOD SAFETY

Food safety guidelines are important to follow when your immune system is weakened by HIV.

Germs and **toxins** can be passed to you from food that has been improperly cooked, handled or stored.

Food poisoning symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, cramps, diarrhoea and headaches.

You should seek medical attention immediately if you suspect you have it.

There are 4 main things to remember for good food hygiene:

- **Cleanliness**
- **Preparation and Cooking**
- **Chilling**
- **Cross-contamination and Storage**

1. Cleanliness

You can prevent the spread of harmful bacteria by observing good personal hygiene and keeping work surfaces, utensils, etc... clean.

It is important to wash your hands thoroughly especially:

- After visiting the toilet.
- After handling raw foods.
- Before touching ready to eat foods.

And remember:

- Be extra cautious when handling food if you are ill with stomach problems, such as diarrhoea or vomiting.
- Don't touch food if you have sores or cuts, unless they are covered with a waterproof dressing.
- Keep pets away from foods.
- During food preparation, wipe hands on a separate kitchen towel (not a tea towel). Wash towels and clothes very often.
- Avoid wooden chopping boards (these harbour bacteria) instead use plastic, glass or marble boards as these are safer. Board should be changed regularly and washed immediately after use.
- Don't overload your fridge and defrost and clean it regularly.
- For all floors, work surfaces, crockery and cutlery comply with the following sequence:
 1. Degrease
 2. Sanitise
 3. Rinse thoroughly

2. Preparation and cooking

- Discard any food or drink after the end of the use by date. Always check this before purchasing.
- If any of your food is mouldy through away the entire affected piece (toxins may have diffused into the rest of the food).
- Do not thaw frozen food at room temperature- the fridge is ideal, a microwave is even faster, and ensure that it is defrosted to the middle.
- Marinate food in the fridge and not at room temperature.
- Proper cooking kills food poisoning bacteria such as listeria, salmonella, E. coli 0157 and campylobacter. It is important to cook food thoroughly, especially meat.
- Shellfish and steamed fish should be cooked for at least 7 minutes.
- Meat should be too hot to touch (if using a meat thermometer, ensure the inside temperature is between 70-85°C for at least 2 minutes).
- Cook eggs thoroughly ensure both white and the yolk are hard.
- Barbequed food should be well cooked in the middle (this is a common source of food poisoning).
- Always follow cooking instruction on the packets and recipes.

3. Chilling and storage

It is very important to keep food at the correct temperature to prevent bacteria growing.

Freezer: at or below -18°C

Fridge: between 0-5°C

- Cooked food should be covered and cooled down as quickly as possible (within an hour) in a cold place. Wrap well and store properly. Large quantities should be stored in small containers. then be place appropriately in the fridge or freezer.
- Raw meat poultry and fish should be kept near the bottom of the fridge to reduce the chance of drips contaminating other foods. In addition these products should be cooked after 48h of purchasing.
- Keep eggs in the main part of the fridge in their original packaging- in is not as cold in the special eggs shelf in the door.
- When shopping, buy chilled/frozen foods last, pack together and try to get items home swiftly: cool bags can be useful if weather is hot or shops are at a distance.

Leftovers

- Leftover tinned food should be removed from the tin and stored in an appropriate container in the fridge.
- Re-heat everything thoroughly, especially if using a microwave. Food should be at least **70°C** in the middle. Do not re-heat food more than once.

4. Cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is a transfer of bacteria from foods (usually raw) to other foods and is one of the major causes of food poisoning.

The bacteria can be transferred directly when one food touches (or drips onto) another, or indirectly, for example from hands, equipment, work surfaces, or knives and other utensils.

To prevent cross-contamination:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly before preparing food and between working with raw and cooked foods.
- Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods separate.
- Use different chopping boards for raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Clean knives and other utensils thoroughly after use with raw food.
- Ensure all work areas are thoroughly cleaned after food preparation and serving.

Eating out:

- Avoid grubby places.
- Ask for your meat, fish or poultry to be **well** cooked or medium well done. When it arrives, check that it's fully cooked and hot and if not do not hesitate to send it back.
- Ensure foods which are supposed to be cold are cold and not at room temperature. Be especially careful of food in salad bars which should be cold and fresh.
- Food containing eggs may be risky. Unless you are sure the restaurant uses pasteurised eggs you should avoid freshly made mayonnaise, Caesar Salad dressing and Hollandaise Sauce. Also sticky meringues, tiramisu, some ice creams and mousses contain raw eggs.

Foods to avoid:

- Beware of sushi and other raw fish. Some kinds of sushi are made with vegetables or steamed fish and are fine to eat. Take care with shellfish as it is usually steamed for only a couple of minutes - not long enough to kill all the bacteria.
- Dairy products should be made from pasteurised milk - check the label.
- Avoid recipes which include **uncooked egg** (see Eating out section) e.g. mayonnaise, mousses, ice-cream, egg nog. Pasteurised egg is fine.
- Avoid **soft ripened** cheeses such as Brie, Camembert and some goats' cheeses, as well as blue-veined cheeses. All cheeses are safe to eat once cooked. Harder cheeses, cream and cottage cheeses are all fine.
- Meat pastes and pates may contain bacteria, so it is best to avoid these unless they have been freshly prepared and are well cooked.
- Remember, if your favourites are on the 'to be avoided' list there may be alternatives e.g. mayonnaise sold in shops is made from pasteurised eggs and is fine.

These recommendations may seem daunting, but it's well worth bearing them in mind. **They could prevent a stay in hospital.**

This information was provided by the Dietetics team of the HIV/GU Medicine Directorate of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. For more information please call 020 8746 8178. Updated November 2006