Do you cook and bring food to an elderly relative or friend in an aged care facility?

It’s really nice to show you care by cooking special favourite meals for the resident of an aged care facility - perhaps culturally specific food or a family favourite which is not normally available in that facility.*

But if you do, you really wouldn’t want to make them sick, so there are some things you need to know.

Our immune systems get weaker as we get older. Also, our stomachs produce less acid, which makes it easier for harmful germs to get through the digestive system and invade our bodies.

If elderly people do get food poisoning, they are likely to suffer more severe consequences. These can range from mild dehydration to neuromuscular dysfunction or even death. Older people also take longer than most of us to recover from food poisoning.

There are some foods that pose a higher risk than others, particularly of passing on a Listeria infection which is dangerous for the elderly.

*Aged care homes have different rules about accepting and reheating food provided by friends or relatives. Please check with the facility.

The elderly person may have special dietary requirements or restrictions of which you are unaware. Please check with the staff before providing food to an elderly resident.

What are the higher risk foods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cold meats</th>
<th>Cooked or uncooked, packaged or unpackaged e.g. Roast beef, ham etc.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold cooked chicken</td>
<td>Purchased whole, portions, sliced or diced and pre-packaged chicken sandwiches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pate</td>
<td>Refrigerated pate, liverwurst or meat spreads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salads</td>
<td>Pre-prepared or pre-packaged fruit, vegetables or salads e.g. from salad bars, retail outlets etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chilled seafood</td>
<td>Raw or smoked ready-to-eat e.g. oysters, sashimi or sushi, smoked salmon or trout, sandwich fillings, pre-cooked peeled prawns such as in prawn cocktails and salads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Pre-packaged and delicatessen soft, semi soft and surface ripened cheeses e.g. brie, camembert, ricotta, feta and blue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Soft serve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other dairy</td>
<td>Unpasteurised dairy products e.g. raw milk, cheese or yoghurt made from raw milk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Foods made with raw egg such as homemade egg mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, uncooked cakes and desserts and egg-nog can also be dangerous for the elderly.

YOU SHOULD NOT PROVIDE THESE FOODS TO AN ELDERLY RESIDENT
What precautions should I take when preparing foods?

You will need to transport your food to the aged care facility so take care that it is protected from contamination during transport and if it is chilled food, it is kept cool or if you are taking it hot, you keep it hot during the journey.

**Food should be kept at 5°C or cooler. For hot food, at 60°C or hotter.**

Between 5 and 60 degrees is known as the temperature danger zone because harmful bacteria multiply to dangerous levels in food when it is kept between these temperatures.

Put cold food into a cooler with ice packs when travelling to visit your relative or friend. Don’t pack food if it has just been cooked and is still warm. Coolers cannot cool food; they can only keep cold food cool. Always cover pre-prepared foods securely and pre-chill them; for example, keep in the refrigerator overnight. Other perishable foods and drinks must also be cold when put in the cooler.

Hot food is difficult to keep hot and is best avoided if you are travelling long distances. It is best to chill the food overnight and reheat it at the residence. If you must take hot food on a longer journey, an insulated jug preheated with boiling water before being filled with the steaming hot food can be used.

If you are unsure whether the jug will keep the food above 60°C, try filling it with water at 90°C, seal and test the water temperature after the length of time you expect your journey to take. If it is still above 60°C then you can use the jug. You will need a food thermometer to do this test. If any perishable food you bring is not eaten immediately, make sure it is refrigerated before you leave.

How can I transport food safely for an elderly person?

You will need to transport your food to the aged care facility so take care that it is protected from contamination during transport and if it is chilled food, it is kept cool or if you are taking it hot, you keep it hot during the journey.

There are no special rules for cooking for elderly people - you just need to be even fussier than normal. If you plan to take chilled or frozen food you have cooked yourself, make sure that the food is cooled quickly in your refrigerator; never at room temperature. Always wash your hands well under running water using soap and dry thoroughly before handling food.

You can get information on preparing food safety from the ‘food safety at home’ page on the Food Safety Information Council website: www.foodsafety.asn.au.

Food should be kept at 5°C or cooler. For hot food, at 60°C or hotter.
If any perishable food you have provided is not eaten immediately, tell the staff and ask them about storing the food in a refrigerator. Some elderly people like to keep extra food in their rooms in drawers or bedside tables for eating later. While this is okay for shelf-stable foods like cakes, biscuits and chocolates, this can be very risky with perishable food such as cold meats, custard or cream filled cakes, cooked vegetables, and meat dishes.

Leaving perishable food in the temperature danger zone for too long before eating can result in food borne illness. Food which can cause food poisoning may not look or taste spoiled. Sometimes elderly people can also forget how long the food has been there.

If you bring commercially prepared food, make sure the elderly person is aware of any ‘best before’ or ‘use by’ date on the food.

If you are cooking for an elderly person, please check the ‘food safety at home’ page on the Food Safety Information Council’s website: www.foodsafety.asn.au for more information on preparing food safely.

**Make sure you tell the staff if the elderly person has some perishable food in their room.**