

Bringing food for patients

Information for patients, residents and visitors



Healthscope hospitals are committed to providing a safe environment for patients, visitors and staff.

This handout has been prepared to explain to patients, residents and visitors what is required to ensure food brought into a Healthscope facility is safe. This is important to prevent illness due to food poisoning, but also for patient safety.

Patients on texture modified diets or thickened fluids have swallowing difficulties. This may restrict what food and drink can safely be provided from outside the hospital. Please check with nursing staff or your speech pathologist to see if this applies to you.

Healthscope facilities do not accept responsibility for food prepared outside the facility's kitchen and provided to patients or residents by visitors. Healthscope also does not accept responsibility for food ordered by patients themselves for delivery into the hospital. This includes food purchased from on-site cafés, take away foods delivered by organisations such as Uber Eats and food retailers.

Can I bring food for patients and residents?

Visitors are asked to observe certain safety guidelines when bringing food into a Healthscope facility. There is a risk of food poisoning when food is not properly prepared, transported or stored. This can have serious consequences for the patient or resident.

Our facilities cater for special dietary needs, e.g. gluten-free or vegetarian food, food allergies and specific religious/cultural requirements.

As well as being safe, food must meet the patient's or resident's medical/nutritional needs. For this reason, we ask that you speak to nursing staff, dietitian or treating medical team if you plan to bring food in for a person you are visiting. Please do not offer food to other patients or residents.

What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning is caused by eating food that contains harmful levels of food poisoning 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 pregnant women, the elderly, 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.



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What food is safe to bring in for patients and residents?

Washed fresh fruit, dry fruit, muesli bars, baked products (e.g. bread, muffins, plain cakes, scones, bagels, biscuits), lollies and chocolate, potato chips, soft drinks, cordial, tea bags, Milo etc. may be suitable, provided there are no medical reasons why a patient/resident should not have them.

What food is potentially unsafe to bring in for patients and residents?

Any food that can spoil if not kept refrigerated is potentially unsafe.

This includes 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, potato salad), sweet dishes and cakes which contain custard or cream or are made from uncooked egg, casseroles, soups and sauces, sandwiches with potentially hazardous food fillings (e.g. meat, fish, poultry, cheese).

Safe food preparation and transport guidelines

Always wash hands with soap and water prior to handling food. All potentially unsafe food must be transported to the facility in an 'esky' or 'chiller' type container. If the 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 maintaining a safe temperature.

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 and time the food was brought into the facility. Food requiring refrigeration must then be refrigerated within 15 minutes of arriving.

Nursing staff will be able to direct you to the refrigerator and provide labels. All potentially unsafe food that is stored in the fridge and not consumed within 24 hours will be discarded by support services daily. Signage regarding this process is displayed on all fridges.

Preparation and reheating

Always wash hands thoroughly before preparation and prior to handling food.

Food requiring reheating must be reheated thoroughly so that it is *steaming or boiling* (or in strict accordance with the manufacturer's heating instructions) to ensure it reaches a minimum temperature of 77°C for two minutes. This will kill most food-borne bacteria and viruses that can cause illness.

Food that has been reheated once *must not* be reheated again, and hospital staff should not reheat food that has been provided by visitors.

Further Information

For further information regarding bringing food into a Healthscope facility, please contact:

- Nursing Staff
- Dietitian
- Speech Pathologist
- the Food Services / Catering Department

For general information on food safety, please visit your State Health Department's Food Safety web pages.