

# Fast Facts for Healthy Children



Cadence Health 2007

## Food hazards and dangers

Have you noticed anything out of the unusual lately? – well its Christmas time again when the fridge and freezer are likely to be brimming over with foods, especially leftovers, so we thought another reminder on the facts of food hazards and food safety would be a good theme to end the year off on.

There's one thing that you don't want to give others – or yourself this Christmas, yet many people do. It's an easy gift and one that'll be remembered for a long time – it's a little dose of foodborne illness. Good food handling in the home plays a key role in preventing foodborne illness.

We hope you have enjoyed our fact sheets over the year and look forward to providing you with many more containing great tips to help you through the coming year.

Wishing you all a fun filled and safe festive season, from the Team at Cadence Health.

### 1. Hazardous foods and safe eating

Infants and young children don't have back teeth which are used to chew and grind food down to smaller pieces. Along with this and their still developing eating method puts them at risk of choking. Too many toddlers and preschoolers think eating is just an inconvenience in a day that otherwise is filled with play. The tendency to take large mouthfuls of food and get it down as fast as possible is common.

#### What are the age groups most at risk from food-related choking?

- 90% occurs in infants and children under the age of 5 years
- 65% in children under 2

#### What foods are the most common offenders?

1. Candy (sweets)
2. Nuts
3. Grapes

#### Tips for making food safer

- Always sit down to eat in a calm manner.
- Supervise infants or young children while they eat.
- Avoid hard and round small foods or chop them into irregular small pieces.
- Encourage children to take small-medium bites, to eat slowly and to chew their food well.
- Never force food into a child's mouth.

- Suggestions note that it may be wise to avoid sticky foods such as melted cheeses and peanut butter; however the incidence of asphyxiation with these foods is lower.
- Cut meat, poultry and sausage into small pieces and take skin and excess fat off.
- Grate, cook or mash small hard fruit and veggies.
- Avoid small hard pieces especially rounded shapes.
- Avoid nuts, seeds, popcorn, whole grapes and sweets.



#### What do you do if a child chokes on food?

If the child is breathing, then check their mouth for food, remove any food stuff you can see and ask the child to cough to see if this brings any more food up (which should be removed also). Keep an eye on the child for a while to ensure the danger is over. If a child is still not breathing easily after two minutes, dial 000 for an ambulance.

Where a child has stopped breathing place him or her face down across your lap, their head should be lower than their chest. Give a sharp blow between the shoulders using the heel of your open hand only. Check their mouth and take out any food you can see. Repeat this process up to five times if required. Should the child still not be breathing dial 000 for an ambulance.

Consider taking a first aid or Red Cross course; there are now children specific first aid courses. Contact:

- St John Ambulance – [www.stjohn.org.au](http://www.stjohn.org.au) or [www.stjohn.org.nz](http://www.stjohn.org.nz)
- Red Cross – [www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au) or [www.redcross.org.nz](http://www.redcross.org.nz)
- 24 hour Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100 or [www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)
- Parent Helpline in NZ - 0800 472 7368

## 2. Food safety

Basic foods that are classed as potentially hazardous, and require special attention in terms of their handling and cooking include:

- Raw and cooked meat or food containing meat such as curries, pizza, pasta etc.
- Dairy products or food containing dairy products such as cheese sauces.
- Seafood or food containing seafood.
- Pre-prepared fruits and vegetables such as salads.
- Cooked rice and pasta.
- Food rich in protein or food containing protein-rich food such as eggs sandwich, beans and nuts, or food containing protein-rich food such as quiche.
- Honey can be dangerous for infants due to the dormant bacteria spores.

### How long does food last in the fridge?

Once again a timely reminder of the maximum length of time commonly refrigerated foods will store for:

Food	Length of maximum storage (days)
Meat – raw ground	1-2
Fish – raw	1-2
Poultry	1-2
Meat – minced and offal	2-3
Leftovers	3-5
Meat – raw	3-5
Mixed vegetable dishes	3-5
Ham	3-5
Salads – mayo based	3-5
Milk	5-7
Cooked egg	1 week
Bacon	1 week
Sausages – smoked	1 week
Fruit juices	1-2 weeks
Egg – raw	2 – 4 weeks
Bacon – unopened	2 – 4 weeks
Butter	2 months
Mayo – jar	2 months
Cheese – dry	2 months
Oil, margarine and fat	Variable (6 months)

Other storage tips include:

- Using the coldest part of the refrigerator for foods you want to keep longer can be useful.
- Always cover foods with strong odours such as fish and onion.
- Closed airtight containers are more effective than cling wrap at keeping bugs at bay.
- Always place bought frozen food into the fridge as soon as you can.
- Store food in cool darkened cupboards.
- Store food in dark containers and dark areas.
- Keep food in containers that prevent moisture leaks in or out.
- Always use older products first and place fresher foods to the back of the shelf or fridge.

### What is the safest way to cool food down?

The cooling process after cooking is often when bugs start to grow, this generally occurs between 60°C and 50°C. The longer food takes to cool down, the greater the opportunity for nasties to multiply. Food should be cooled as quickly as possible, for example in **less than two hours** after cooking.

Cooling methods to improve food safety include:

- Once food has stopped steaming, place it in the fridge.
- Cut food into smaller pieces to speed up the cooling down process.
- Use appropriate sized contains, for example, shallow containers for foods that are liquid or pourable.
- Create an opportunity for air to flow around the food (while covered).

### What is the safest way to reheat food?

The problem with reheating food is the exact opposite process from cooking. So remember:

- As the food heats up, the bugs again get to work.
- It is not until the food reaches 60°C that they stop.
- Food that is partially reheated and doesn't get to 60°C is more likely to have bugs at work.
- Once again the longer this process of reheating to 60°C takes, the more the bugs can flourish.

### Is it okay to cook frozen foods?

- Many foods can be cooked from frozen such as frozen fruit, vegetables and small parcels of foods.
- Large cuts of meats must be thawed first; this is best done in the refrigerator over 24 to 48 hours to prevent bacterial growth (as it is thawing in a low temperature that bacteria cannot spoil food).
- Frozen meat that is required at short notice, can be thawed under cool water (but think of the water shortage too) or in the microwave (still wrapped).
- Meat that remains partially frozen should be cooked at a higher temperature (71°C or greater) for safety.
- Once a food is thawed it should not be re-frozen, although it can be chilled for up to 48 hours in the refrigerator.

**Thaw food in the fridge!** Don't allow food to thaw slowly in warm temperatures, remember temperatures of 60°C and lower are the danger zones for bugs!

### How long do foods last in the freezer?

Figure 3 provides a guide to the storage life of common foods.

**Figure 3 Effect of storage temperature on storage life of frozen foods**

Product	Storage life in months	
	at -12 °C	at -18 °C
Raspberries, strawberries, raw	5	24
Peaches, apricots, cherries, raw	4	18
Green asparagus, blanched	3	12
Green beans, blanched	4	15
Brussels sprouts, blanched	6	15
Carrots, blanched	10	18
Prawns, cooked and peeled	2	5
Fatty fish, glazed, raw	3	5
Lean fish, single fillets, raw	6	9
Chicken, raw	9	18
Pork, raw	6	10
Lamb, raw	12	18
Beef, raw	8	18
Liver, raw	4	12

Source: Food Science Australia, adapted from International Institute of Refrigeration (1986)

### Tips on cleanliness and safety

The most highly influential factor in preventing food contamination is without doubt cleanliness. Most of the time most of us are very careful with hygiene; however here is a list of actions that should be taken when dealing with food:

- Wash fruit and scrub vegetables before use or before refrigerating.
- Use hot soapy water to wash your hands.
- Use appropriate cutting boards, for example a wooden ones made from hard wood are best.
- Do not cross-contaminate foods, for example raw meats, poultry or eggs should not be placed together.
- Never use your fingers.
- Keep hair away from food.
- Reduce the exposure to anyone who may be unwell.
- Wash sponges in the machine and replace regularly.
- Clean up food spills with paper towels and dispose immediately.
- If you are at all suspicious of food best bet is to discard it, don't take a risk.

Adapted from the **Certificate of Diet and Nutrition for Children**  
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