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Senior Wellness Series

Transporting Food Safely

FACT SHEET 04-05



References:

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Transporting Food Safely

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that 128,000 people each year are hospitalized for food poisoning. Foods contaminated by harmful bacteria and viruses can cause a food borne illness. Older adults and children are considered most susceptible.

Contamination can occur during any stage that involves contact with food products. Hazardous conditions can be created while transporting food. Bacteria and viruses can multiply enough to cause illness, or even death, when perishable foods are in the temperature danger zone too long. This can happen when you bring food home from the grocery store or take leftovers home from a restaurant.

Remember these safety temperatures while transporting your food.

Danger Zone 40°F-140°F

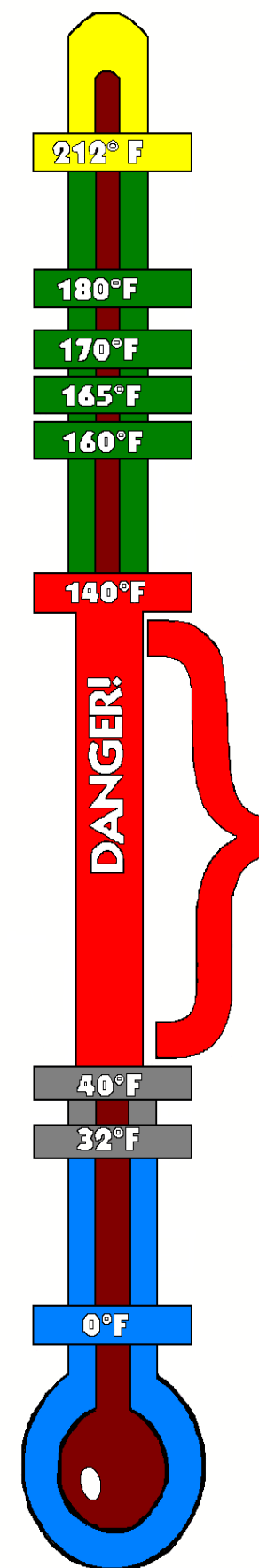
Perishable foods like meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, milk, and eggs can become seriously contaminated if left unrefrigerated. Warm temperatures can lead to dangerous bacteria growth. **IF FOOD STAYS IN THIS RANGE** for more than 2 hours; or more than 1 hour in hot summer months, it should be **THROWN OUT**. Bacteria can double every twenty minutes at room temperature.

Safe Refrigerator Temperatures 32°F-40°F

This is a safe temperature for transporting and storing perishable foods because refrigeration slows bacterial growth. When a refrigerator is set at 40 degrees or below, it will protect most foods until they are eaten or their storage time expires.

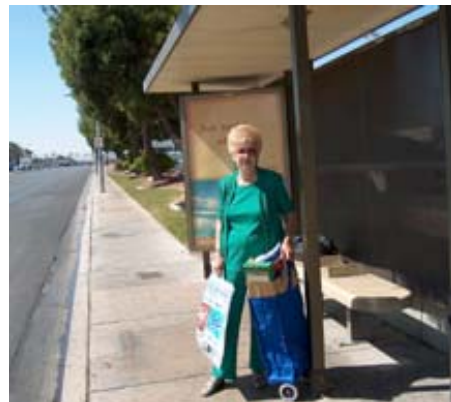
Safe Freezer Temperature 0°F

Foods kept at this temperature will have an extended storage time. Freezing stops, but does not kill, harmful bacteria.



To Safely Bring Food into Your Home

- ▶ In the summer, grocery shop early in the morning or in the evening when it is cooler outside.
- ▶ Don't do other errands on the way home from the grocery store. The temperature in a parked car in the summertime can exceed 140 degrees within a few minutes!
- ▶ While transporting groceries, always keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
- ▶ Place food in the air conditioned part of the car and not the trunk.
- ▶ Refrigerate or freeze perishables or prepared foods within 2 hours; 1 hour if the temperature is 90 degrees or higher.
- ▶ If the travel time from store to home will be longer than one hour, pack your perishable food in an ice chest or insulated bag. Be especially careful to do this during hot weather.



If you usually walk or take the bus to the store, it will be difficult to carry an ice chest with you. The key to keeping food safe while bringing it home lies in carefully planning transportation arrangements.

You might take a lightweight, empty ice chest to the store and put it in your cart. Fill the ice chest with perishable food while you shop and buy a bag of ice on the way out to keep your ice chest cold. Then have a friend pick you up at the store at a pre-arranged time.

Or, maybe you can arrange to supply the ice if a friend supplies the car and gas—you could do your shopping together.



Meals on the Go!

Many of us choose to eat out or bring home already prepared food rather than taking the time to prepare meals. This includes grocery store deli foods and restaurant carry-out food. If mishandled, this ready-to-eat food, along with packed foods like a lunch, can cause food poisoning. Transport food safely by remembering the 2-hour rule and discarding any foods that have entered the danger zone.

A Packed Lunch

A packed lunch, with perishable items like meat or cheese, must be kept cold. A clean, insulated lunch bag with an ice pack is an easy way to do this. Keep cold foods in the refrigerator or freezer until you are ready to leave. Hot foods like soup or stew can be kept hot by using an insulated thermos.

An insulated lunch bag could also be used to transport a few small, perishable items from the grocery store or to transport medications.



Ready-to-eat Food

Carry-out foods from a restaurant or grocery store deli must be handled carefully to avoid the *spread* or *rapid growth* of harmful bacteria. This also applies to doggie bags from restaurants. You can maintain a food-safe temperature by using an ice cooler, insulated bag, or going straight home. Keep in mind that leftovers may already have been on the plate for an hour or more while you dined out. You should eat hot foods within two hours, keep food hot at 140 degrees until you are ready to eat, and immediately refrigerate leftovers. Cold foods should be refrigerated, frozen, or eaten within 1-2 hours.

Traveling with Food

Always use a clean cooler, filled with ice or an ice pack, to keep foods cold. A full cooler will maintain cold temperatures longer. Placing drinks in a separate cooler can help you avoid having to open and close the food cooler many times. Keep foods like meat, poultry, and fish packaged separately and on the bottom to avoid cross contamination. Hot foods can be kept hot in insulated bags.

