



Foods to Avoid for People at Risk of Food-borne Illness

Most people can eat most food they buy at the grocery store. However, some people with weakened immune systems are at risk of food-borne illness. They may get sick from eating some foods, even those prepared safely. Some foods can be a higher risk.

The government works with the food industry to reduce the risk of food-borne illness and to monitor food safety.

Who is at risk of food-borne illness?

There are several groups of people who have weakened or undeveloped immune systems. They are at higher risk of food-borne illness, including:

- Elderly persons.
- People with AIDS, cancer, kidney disease, and certain other chronic diseases.
- Those with autoimmune disorders, such as lupus.
- Those who have had surgery to remove the spleen.
- Those being treated with immune-suppressing medications.
- Children under 2 years of age.
- Pregnant women and their unborn or newborn babies.
- Those with a history of alcohol or drugs use.

Foods to avoid for people at risk

Meats, fish, milk and eggs:

Always properly cook raw meats and seafood such as chicken and turkey, beef, pork, fish and shellfish. Do not drink unpasteurized milk or eat unpasteurized cheese. Do not eat uncooked or undercooked eggs.

Health protection agencies also recommend that people at risk avoid the following foods.

Deli meats:

Deli meats and hot dogs are not always cooked thoroughly when produced in the factory. It is possible that some harmful germs may survive and grow.

You can reduce the risk by not eating deli meats and hot dogs, or by cooking them well. Refrigerated raw and smoked seafood should also be cooked before it is eaten.

Soft cheeses:

Some cheeses are at higher risk of contamination, depending on how these are made. Soft cheeses, such as Camembert, Brie, feta, and Mexican style cheeses such as queso blanco or queso fresco, can cause illness in people with weak immune systems.

Hard cheeses, processed cheeses, cream cheese and cottage cheese are not a risk.

Uncooked sprouts:

Raw or undercooked sprouted seeds such as bean sprouts, radish sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, and others may carry germs that can cause food poisoning or illness. If cooked properly, these are not a risk.

Uncooked shellfish:

People at increased risk of illness should not eat undercooked or uncooked bivalve shellfish, such as clams, oysters, mussels, and scallops. Harmful germs may be found in the waters with shellfish. These germs tend to build up in bivalve shellfish due to the way these animals feed.

Liver pate (paTAY):

Liver pate has been linked to illness outbreaks. If you are at risk of food-borne illness, you should not eat this food.

Unpasteurized fruit juices/ciders:

People at risk should not drink unpasteurized juices/ciders, or else boil these for at least two minutes beforehand. These have caused outbreaks of food poisoning in recent years, including Cryptosporidiosis, Salmonella and E. coli.

What can I do to make fresh fruits and vegetables safe to eat?

People with weakened immune systems should cook fruits and vegetables, especially if grown in or on the ground.

If fruits and vegetables are eaten raw, they should be washed well with clean water or peeled before eating. Peeled fruits and vegetables, such as bananas and oranges, are less of a risk than those eaten unpeeled.

Cantaloupe is a higher risk even when peeled and should not be eaten. Take extra care when washing produce, such as parsley or lettuce. These are harder to clean thoroughly.

For More Information

For more information on food safety, see the following HealthLink BC Files:

[#02 Hamburger Disease](#)

[#17 Salmonellosis](#)

[#59a Food Safety: Ten Easy Steps to Make Food Safe](#)

[#59b Food Safety for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#)

[#59c Food Safety: Instructions on Food Labels](#)

[#72 Unpasteurized Fruit Juices: A Potential Health Risk](#)

[#75 Listeriosis](#)



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