
Food Safety During Treatment

Cancer and its treatment can weaken your immune system and leave you at risk for infections. Cancer-fighting drugs work by killing cancer cells as well as healthy white blood cells. When your white blood cell count is low, you are at the highest risk for infections. The increased risk for infections can make it harder for your body to protect itself from a foodborne illness (also called food poisoning). Practicing food safety can help protect you from foodborne illnesses.

Recommendations for Safe Food Handling:

- Store foods at safe temperatures:
 - Refrigerator temperature should be kept below 40° F.
 - Freezer temperature should be kept below 0° F.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- Use separate cutting boards for meats, raw fruits, and vegetables.
- Clean and sanitize food preparation surfaces and utensils after each use.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator or microwave. Never thaw foods at room temperature. Cook foods immediately after thawing.
- Refrigerate all leftovers within 2 hours of cooking. Be sure to dispose of foods not eaten within 1 week.
- Purchase and consume food before the expiration and “sell by” dates. Choose only foods without a bad smell or mold and no significant cuts or bruises.
- Avoid food from street vendors, salad bars, buffet restaurants, or shared bins in grocery stores.
- Avoid all uncooked sprouts, such as alfalfa, bean or clover sprouts.
- Do not consume undercooked foods such as meats (including poultry and fish) and eggs. They must be fully cooked.
- Only eat hot dogs or deli/luncheon meats that are steaming hot.

- Keep hot food hot (above 140°F) and cold food cold (below 40°F).
- Use a food thermometer by inserting in the center of the food to check if food is cooked to safe temperature. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommended safe minimum internal temperature (Fahrenheit):

Chicken Breast: 165°	Leftover and Casseroles: 165°
Egg Dishes: 160°	Pork: 165°
Fish: 145°	Steaks and Roasts: 145°
Ground Beef: 160°	Whole Poultry: 165°

- Avoid all unpasteurized foods, including eggs, juices, honey, beer, dairy products, soft cheeses (such as brie, blue-veined, camembert, feta, queso fresco, queso blanco or panela).
- Substitute frozen pasteurized eggs or powdered egg whites for raw eggs in recipes such as eggnog, Caesar salad dressing and meringues.
- Avoid drinking well water, unless tested safe each year.

For further questions, please contact your VA Dietitian.