

Bringing food into hospital for family and friends

Information for visitors



INTRODUCTION

Food gifts such as fruit, flavoured drinks and confectionary are traditionally taken to hospital by relatives/friends and appreciated by the patients who receive them.

However it is important to ensure that all food gifts are suitable and safe.

Any food gifts must be of a small quantity due to lack of storage. They should be for your relative/friend to consume and not shared with other patients. **Ward staff cannot reheat food.**

DIET

It is important to appreciate that many patients may be on special/restricted diets whilst in hospital, for example for medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, weight reduction or following an operation.

It is vital to **ask staff** before you buy or prepare items of food which may be unsuitable.

STORAGE

Wards have limited or no refrigerator storage. Therefore, please only bring in small amounts of perishable goods and hand them directly to the ward staff if the food is not going to be consumed at the visiting time. Pests can be attracted to poorly wrapped or stored items. For baked goods and biscuit to stay fresh, they need to be kept in an air tight container. It is essential to label all containers or packets with your friend or relative's name and the date you brought the food gifts into the hospital.

PURCHASE

Purchase items from a reputable retailer. The external wrapping should be in place, not torn, and clean. Ensure the "Use By" or "Best Before" dates have not been exceeded.

PREPARATION

If you are preparing food in your own home to take to a friend or relative remember the following food hygiene tips:

- ❖ Do not prepare food if you yourself are unwell, particularly if you are suffering from diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- ❖ Wash your hands after going to the toilet and before handling food.
- ❖ Wrap foods well before bringing them into hospital to prevent contamination by dust or flies.
- ❖ For foods that will “spoil” in the heat, it is advisable to use a “cool box” or insulated bag to carry them in.
- ❖ Do not prepare food too far in advance.

BRINGING FOOD INTO HOSPITAL

SUITABLE	UNSUITABLE - HIGH RISK
Pre-wrapped biscuits and cakes	Cooked meat and poultry
Fresh fruit and fruit products	Cooked meat products including gravy and stock
Pre-wrapped chocolates or sweets	Fresh or artificial cream products, custards, yogurts and mousse
Packets of crisps	Cooked rice
Bottled or canned drinks	Sandwiches and rolls
Pancakes, scones, fruit cakes and so on, providing the food is prepared in a safe and hygienic environment.	Any other item of food which requires refrigeration or heating.

TAKEAWAY FOODS

It is generally not acceptable for takeaway food to be brought into hospital. **In exceptional circumstances these high risk foods may be allowed into the ward ensuring the following conditions:**

- ❖ Prior discussion must take place with the nurse in charge
- ❖ Food should be purchased from a reputable retailer
- ❖ Food must be consumed as soon as possible following delivery
- ❖ Leftovers will be discarded.
There must be no reheating of food at ward level.

Please remember

- ❖ Food eaten after the 'Use by Date' may cause illness even though there may be no obvious change to its smell or colour, taste or texture. All food must be eaten prior to the expiry date.
- ❖ Please remember to inform the nurse in charge when you have brought food gifts into hospital for your friend or relative, especially if the items are considered to be high risk (**see section 'Bringing Food into Hospital'**). This enables the nursing staff to adhere to guidance by documenting the details in your friend or relative's notes.
- ❖ **Your extra care can prevent a friend or relative from becoming unnecessarily ill.**
- ❖ **Outbreaks of illness such as E. coli O157 and Salmonella in hospitals have been linked to homemade cream cakes, chicken and other foods.**

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