

Food poisoning can be very serious for patients recovering from illness or an operation so St. Vincent's has guidelines about what food can and can't be brought into our facilities.

The lists of 'safe' and 'unsafe' foods are about preventing food poisoning only. The lists do not reflect that many people must follow a specific diet because of their medical condition. Please talk to the unit dietitian for further information.

### Other guidelines

St. Vincent's cannot accept responsibility for food prepared externally that is given to patients/residents by relatives and visitors. However, there are storage and reheating facilities available that patients and visitors are welcome to use for safe foods.

Please let the staff know about food you bring. The staff will ensure that all food is labelled with the following information:

- patient's name and room number
- the date the food was prepared and by whom
- the date the food was brought into the health service

This brochure explains what food can and can't be brought into St. Vincent's facilities (hospitals, residential care homes, hospices) by patients/residents and their visitors.

It has been written to help prevent food poisoning.

For further information about food preparation, handling and transport please speak to your nurse.

### Need more information?

Please contact the Quality & Risk Unit on 9288 3940 or email [Consumers.Advisory@svhm.org.au](mailto:Consumers.Advisory@svhm.org.au)

The Victorian Department of Health  
[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

Food Safety Victoria  
[www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/)

### Do you need an interpreter?

St Vincent's provides a free, confidential interpreting service. Please ask your doctor or nurse to organise one for you.

This brochure was reviewed July 2011 SV678



ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL  
MELBOURNE

## CAN I BRING FOOD FOR PATIENTS AND RESIDENTS?

Information for carers and visitors



ST VINCENT'S  
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PO Box 2900 Fitzroy  
VIC 3065 Australia  
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[www.svhm.org.au](http://www.svhm.org.au)

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## Can I bring food for patients and residents?

Yes, as long as the food is safe and the patient is not on a special diet or experiencing swallowing problems.

Families and friends sometimes bring in food as a treat for patients or to supplement the existing menu.

Please speak to a member of the healthcare team if you have any concerns or questions about the patient or resident's nutritional requirements, cultural or religious needs, or if the patient is having swallowing difficulties and has been placed on thickened drinks or texture-modified food.

There can be a risk of food poisoning when food is not properly prepared, transported or stored. This can have serious consequences for the patient.

## Why does St. Vincent's have to be so strict?

St. Vincent's is committed to providing a safe environment for patients, residents, visitors and staff.

St. Vincent's must comply with Australian food safety standards and the Victorian Food Act 1984.

All St. Vincent's facilities are regularly reviewed to make sure the organisation complies with these laws, regulations and standards.

The immune systems of many patients in hospital are considerably lower than those not admitted to hospital. Food which is left in an uncontrolled temperature range for more than four hours is dangerous and needs to be discarded as it may cause serious food poisoning to the patient.

## What food is safe to bring in for patients and residents?

For patients who are on normal diets you can bring:

- dry biscuits e.g. Salada, Savoy, rice crackers, water crackers
- muesli bars, sweet biscuits e.g. Scotch Fingers, Butter Nut Snaps, Granita, fruit biscuits, biscotti
- pretzels, potato chips
- fresh and dried fruit
- bread, bread sticks, bagels, unleaven bread
- muffins, cakes, scones, pikelets (no cream)
- boiled lollies, liquorice, mints

Please check with a member of the healthcare team before bringing in food for a patient on a special diet or with swallowing difficulties.

## What food is potentially unsafe to bring in for patients and residents?

- any food that can spoil if not refrigerated
- raw or cooked meat, poultry
- fish, shell fish, oysters

- rice and pasta dishes, casseroles, soups, sauces
- soft cheeses, deli meats, pâtés
- salads and other items containing dairy products or creamy dressings e.g. coleslaw, potato salad
- sweet dishes containing custard or cream
- sandwiches with potentially hazardous food fillings (meat, fish, poultry, cheese)

If you are unsure about what is safe, or wish to bring in any of these items, please talk to the healthcare team.

## What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning is a condition that can have serious and unpleasant effects. It is caused by eating food that contains harmful levels of disease-causing bacteria or toxins.

Food can become dangerous if it is not handled safely during:

- all stages of preparation
- cooking
- storage
- transport
- serving

The symptoms of food poisoning vary, but usually include one or more of the following: nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fever and headaches.