

## Other guidelines

St Vincent's cannot accept responsibility for food prepared externally, 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 help you to 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.

All unsafe food components (commercially prepared or home cooked) that arrive to the ward at room temperature will not be

stored in the refrigeration units. These must be consumed immediately or discarded.

Any potentially dangerous food that has been refrigerated for more than 24 hours will be discarded at around 9.00am to minimise the risk of food poisoning.

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

## Need more information?

**Please contact St Vincent's Nutrition Department on (03) 9231 3755.**

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

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

# Can I bring food for patients and residents?

Information for carers and visitors

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.

### **Can I bring food for patients and residents?**

Yes, as long as the food is safe and suitable for any special dietary needs the patient may have.

Families and friends sometimes bring in food as a treat for patients or to supplement the existing menu. Please speak to staff if you have any concerns or questions about the patient's 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.

### **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 cooking, storage, transport and serving.

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

Food poisoning can be very serious for patients recovering from illness or an operation.

St Vincent's guidelines 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.

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

For patients who are on normal diets you can bring:

- pretzels, potato chips, dry biscuits or crackers
- muesli bars, sweet biscuits e.g. Scotch Fingers, fruit biscuits, biscotti
- fresh and dried fruit
- bread, bread sticks, bagels, unleavened 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, shellfish, 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 e.g. meat, fish, poultry, cheese.

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

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.

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.