

# Food Preparation and Food Safety

## BASIC FOODS AND INGREDIENTS TO HAVE ON HAND

Whether you are preparing a meal in a full apartment kitchen or in a kitchen in a residence hall, it is helpful to know useful "starter foods" with which to create a meal. Though you can expand this list for a larger kitchen, here are guides for foods to have on hand for the dorm kitchen.

<b>Refrigerator Basics</b>	<b>Grains</b>
Eggs	Boxed pasta
Light butter/non-transfat acid spread	Brown or white rice
Plain and flavored yogurt	Dry cereal (higher fiber bran)
Low-fat milk	Instant cooked cereal packets
Flour or corn tortillas	Bagel, bread, English muffins
Pre-shredded low-fat cheese	
Bagged salad and baby carrots	<b>Freezer Staples</b>
Low-fat cottage cheese	Chopped spinach
Pre-grated Parmesan cheese	Broccoli florets
Fruit, as space permits	Peas
	Coffee
<b>Canned and Packaged Foods</b>	Snack foods
Chicken and vegetable broth	Tea bags
Vegetarian refried beans	
Water-packed tuna fish	<b>Bottled or Jarred Food</b>
Dehydrated lower-fat soups	Olive oil
Canned soup: Minestrone, lentil, vegetable	Lemon Juice
Applesauce	Soy Sauce
Plain microwave popcorn	Mustard
	Salsa
<b>Spices and Seasoning</b>	Balsamic or red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper	Spaghetti Sauce
Garlic powder, onion salt, celery salt	Low-Fat Mayonnaise
Other favorite seasonings	Barbeque Sauce
Sugar	Honey
	Peanut Butter

## UTENSILS THAT WILL BE HELPFUL

It is easy to spend a small fortune to equip your kitchen, but it is not necessary. Ask your relatives for their cast-offs, check out local garage sales before you come to school, or head down to a Salvation Army Store for some great bargains. Quality is most important when it comes to knives and good grades of pots and pans, which spread heat more evenly and will cook foods more dependably.

Depending on your budget and what is allowed in your residence hall, you might want to invest in a small refrigerator, a microwave, a steamer-cooker, a blender, and/or a George Foreman type of grilling machine.

Basic cooking utensils for your kitchen:

- 2 microwave-safe mixing bowls, 1 large and 1 small
- 9" x 9" baking dish
- 2 sharp knives (1 paring knife and 1 larger knife for chopping, dicing, etc.)
- Liquid and dry measuring cups & measuring spoons
- 2 small cutting boards
- 1 wooden spoon, 1 rubber spatula
- Can opener, bottle opener
- Small hand grater or electric chopper, colander
- Aluminum foil, plastic wrap, graded for microwave use
- Ziplock bags
- Paper towels, plastic plates, napkins, eating utensils, glasses, cups
- Sponge, potholder, dishtowel

## BUYING GROCERIES

Start with a shopping list. Having a list gives you a plan and makes you less susceptible to impulse shopping. Think about your meals for the week to avoid forgetting things. Another recommendation is to shop when you are not hungry. Studies of consumer behavior have found that people will purchase more foods high in fats and sugar, as well as higher-priced snack foods, when they are moderately to very hungry. Grab some yogurt or fruit before you grab the shopping cart! For the most part, you will save money by shopping at larger supermarkets instead of small convenience stores. Specialty gourmet markets are usually more expensive as well.

When you are checking out the cost of foods, look at the price label on the store shelf under food items. The best way to compare the cost of two items is to look at the "unit" price (e.g., cents per ounce for brands of tomato sauce). Although one can may cost more, the unit price will tell you if it is the better buy.

As a rule, when buying fresh produce (fruits and vegetables), you will be better off buying items that are in season. It is possible to buy fresh watermelon in January, and grapefruits in the middle of summer, but these items are either being imported from another hemisphere, or have been grown artificially out of season. The taste and price will reflect this. In-season produce will have the highest level of nutrients, cost the least, and score the highest in the flavor category. Also, some other countries use pesticides and herbicides banned in the United States.

Frozen produce will retain almost as many nutrients, and sometimes more, as fresh equivalents. This is because most modern packagers "flash freeze" foods in plants located near fields and orchards. Fresh produce has sometimes been kept in warm railroad cars or in back storerooms for long periods of time, with a subsequent loss of some susceptible nutrients.

## READING THE FOOD LABEL

Food labels must contain the following information:

- **Ingredient List** – A list of ingredients in descending order of predominance and weight.
- **Serving Sizes** – Each package must identify the size of a serving. The nutrition information given on the label is based on one serving of the food.
- **Number of Servings** – Based on that package's definition of a serving size contained in the package.
- **Nutrition Facts** – Each package must identify the quantities of specified nutrients and food constituents for one serving.

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When you read the label, you will be able to see, per serving, the number of calories, the amount of protein, carbohydrate, and fat, plus fiber, and sugar (both listed under carbohydrate), as well as several other nutrients. You will also see totals given for the percentages of Daily Value of various nutrients. Percent Daily Values means an average adult's needs, as based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your own Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie (energy) needs.

If a product is making nutrition claims, the government defines the following key words and health claims that appear on labels as follows:

- *Low fat*: 3 gm of fat or less per serving.
- *Less fat*: 25% or less fat than the comparison food.
- *Fat-free*: Less than 0.5 gm of fat per serving, with no added fat or oil.
- *Lean*: Less than 10 gm of fat and less than 4 gm saturated fat and 95 mg of cholesterol per serving.
- *Low Calorie*: 40 calories or less per serving.
- *Reduced Calorie*: At least 25% fewer calories per serving than the comparison food.
- *Extra Lean*: Less than 5 grams of fat, 2 grams of saturated fat, and 95 mg of cholesterol per (100 gm) serving of meat, poultry, or seafood.
- *Lite or light in fat*: 50% or less of the fat than in the comparison food.
- *Lite or light in calories*: 1/3 fewer calories than in the comparison food.
- *High fiber*: 5 grams or more fiber per serving.
- *Healthy*: A food low in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, and contains at least 10% of the Daily Value for a given nutrient per serving.
- *High, Rich in, or Excellent Source*: 20% or more of the Daily Value for a given nutrient per serving.

## FOOD SAFETY TIPS

Proper storage is a key factor in reducing the chance of food borne illness. Bacteria thrive at room temperature. Store food in the right container, in the right place, at the right temperature to stop bacterial growth before it has a chance to start.

One basic principle that is good to follow is: "when in doubt, throw it out." Becoming sick from eating something that has spoiled is a hard way to learn about the importance of prevention of food borne illness.

The American Dietetic Association's has developed some food safety guidelines that can help you keep your food storage areas safer from contamination. One of the most important things to keep in mind is temperature of foods that normally need to be refrigerated. The "temperature danger zone" (40 degrees F to 140 degrees F) is where bacteria multiply best.

- Keep hot food hot and cold food cold when outside the refrigerator.
- Purchase inexpensive refrigerator thermometers for your refrigerator and freezer compartments and check them occasionally. Refrigerators should be kept between 34 degrees F and 40 degrees F, and the freezer at 0 degree F or lower.
- Wrap foods tightly or cover for storage in the refrigerator or freezer, and move older foods to the front, to be used next.

## Food Storage Guidelines:

Food	Refrigerator	Freezer
Chicken	1 to 2 days	9-12 months
Eggs, Fresh	4 to 5 weeks	
Eggs, Hardcooked	1 week	
Ground Meat	1 to 2 days	3-4 months
Lunch Meats	3 to 4 days, 2 weeks sealed in original packaging	1-2 months
Fresh Beef	3 to 5 days	6-12 months
Fresh Chicken/Turkey	1 to 2 days	9-12 months
Meats, Cooked	3 to 4 days	2-3 months
Poultry, Cooked	3 to 4 days	4-6 months
Butter, Margarine	1 to 2 weeks	6-9 months
Frozen Dinners		3-4 months

## STORAGE OF CANNED FOODS

Canned foods should be kept as cool as possible (i.e., 50 degrees F and 70 degrees F). Canned foods can keep for at least a year. It is safe to store foods in cans after opening if they are covered and refrigerated. Never eat foods from cans that are cracked, bulging, or leaking, or that spurt liquid when opened. Discard these cans immediately.

## SAFE FOOD PREPARATION

- Wash your hands in warm, soapy water before and after every step in the food preparation process.
- Clean food preparation surfaces often and remove food particles. Sanitize cutting boards after each use with hot, soapy water and let them air-dry.
- Beware of cross-contamination of utensils (e.g., do not put cooked meat in the same dish used for raw meat).
- Marinades can only be used if they have been thoroughly cooked. Do not re-use marinades.
- Change dish cloths often. Throw out dirty sponges.
- Thaw frozen meats for cooking in the refrigerator, never at room temperature. If you defrost foods in the refrigerator and not in the microwave, it is safe to refreeze them.
- Do not use a cracked egg you find in the carton; these can harbor disease-carrying organisms.

## SIGNS OF FOOD POISONING

It can be hard to tell the difference between food poisoning and the flu. You may have diarrhea, feel fatigued, and have a stomachache, headache, or fever. These symptoms can hit you anytime from 30 minutes to 2 weeks after eating spoiled food. Most symptoms pass within 24 to 48 hours. You should check with UHS at 275-2662 if you have bloody diarrhea, are vomiting or have very bad diarrhea (which could lead to dehydration if not treated), you have a stiff neck, fever, and headache, and/or the symptoms last longer than 3 days.

## LINKS YOU CAN USE:

Food and Nutrition Information Center  
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans  
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/>