

QUICK FACTS: BROWN BAG IT + PACK A SAFER LUNCH

Whether you're eating healthier, saving a little money, or prefer your own cooking – at some point, just about everybody will “brown bag it” with a homemade lunch. Here are some things to remember to help you pack your food in the safest way possible.

First, wash your hands.

Clean and sanitize your working surfaces. Seeing you in the habit of washing your hands and work surfaces before and after preparing food is an invaluable example of best practices for children and others in your home. **Hand washing with soap and water is best**, but a 60% alcohol hand sanitizer will work in a pinch.

For more on cleaning your work surfaces, see [Quick Facts: Clean, Sanitize, & Disinfect](#)

Individual snack packs are an alternative to the many hands that go in and out of larger bags.

Be aware that portions packed from larger bags of pretzels, chips, cookies, etc. could mean greater potential exposure to contamination.

Room-temperature-safe foods don't need to be refrigerated. Peanut, and other nut butters, jelly, cookies, crackers, chips, dried fruit, nuts, and some whole fresh fruits (bananas, apples, and oranges) can be left out and eaten safely at room temperature.

Wash and separate fresh fruits/veggies thoroughly before packing them. Plastic bags or containers can separate them from other items in the lunchbox. When packing fruits (like apples) with skins that'll be eaten, be sure you've washed and dried them first.

Be aware of the Danger Zone. Bacteria grow rapidly in the temperature “danger zone” of 40°-140° F. Keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold.

An insulated lunchbox, whether hard-sided or soft, will help you keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot until it's time to eat them. A good option is one with an insulated lining and a pocket for a thin freezer pack.

Freezing drinks before packing will help keep the drinks cold, along with other cold foods you've packed. Frozen milk, juice, and water will slowly thaw and be ready to drink when lunchtime arrives. Or, if you prefer, ice packs can be picked up for about \$1 each.

An insulated thermos keeps foods like soups, chili, or mac & cheese hot. Especially when you pack hot foods while hot. Waiting for them to cool down before packing puts them in the temperature danger zone where bacteria multiply. Pour piping hot foods like soups immediately into an insulated thermos. A quick additional step is preheating your thermos with boiling water, letting it sit a few minutes, and then adding your hot food. (Don't forget to pour the hot water out!)

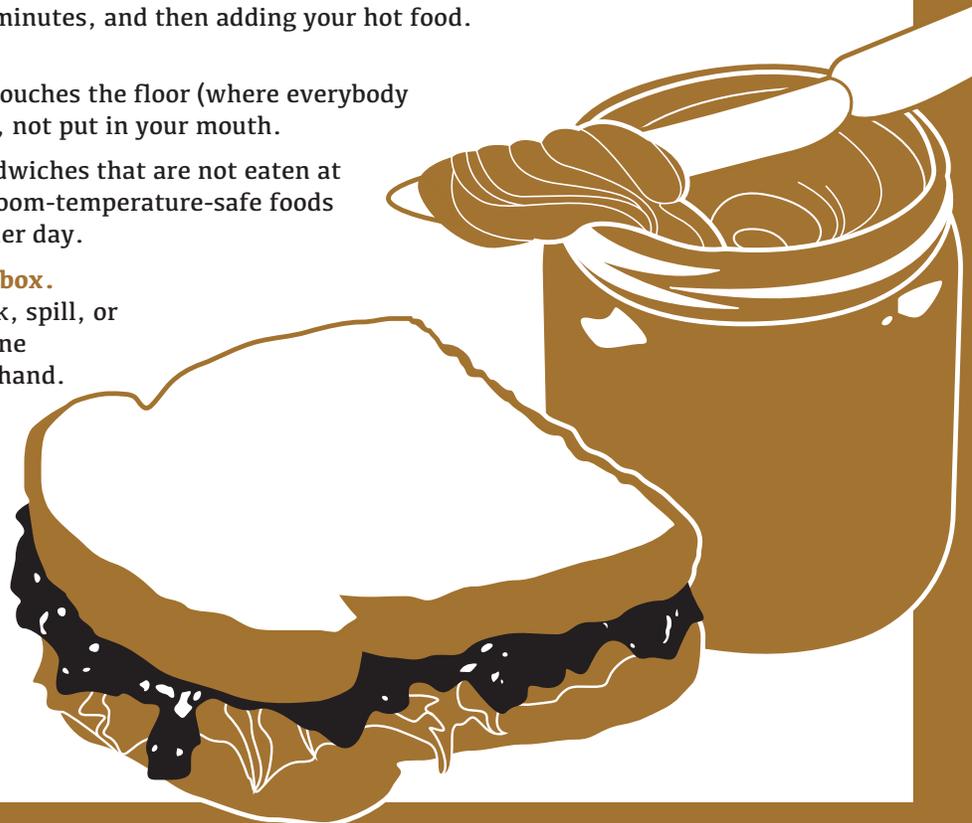
The Myth of the 5-second rule. Any food that touches the floor (where everybody walks, including pets) needs to be thrown away, not put in your mouth.

Perishable foods like meat, poultry, or egg sandwiches that are not eaten at lunchtime should be thrown away. Unopened, room-temperature-safe foods and uneaten fruit can be kept for later, or another day.

After every use, clean and sanitize your lunchbox.

It's inevitable that over time your lunch will leak, spill, or leave an odor in your lunchbox. Some are machine washable, while others will require washing by hand.

The main thing is that you choose food-safe cleaners that won't leave an unpleasant odor or residue in your lunchbox.



QUICK FACTS: EATING AT YOUR DESK

When it comes to desktop dining, foodborne illness is a **BIG** threat. According to a noted microbiologist, professor, and researcher at the University of Arizona, a person's desk may harbor as much as **400** times more bacteria than a toilet seat. The "germiest" places? The phone and desktop, followed by the computer keyboard and mouse. To that we say, **YUCK!** And ...

Follow these seven safety tips to dramatically reduce the risk of contaminating food at your desk.

TIP #1: Clean your desktop frequently. Germs are easily transferred from our hands to our noses, mouths, and eyes. Adults touch their faces about 16 times per hour. This is why it's so important to regularly clean your desk, phone, keyboard, and mouse with disinfectant wipes. See *Quick Facts: Clean, Sanitize, Disinfect*

TIP #2: Refrigerate your lunch ASAP when you get to work. If you bring your lunch to work, refrigerate perishable items like sandwiches with meat/cheese, salads, leftovers, and dairy foods within **TWO HOURS** from the time you made your lunch at home.

TIP #3: Wash your hands. Always wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling food. Hand washing is always the best method, but using a 60%+ alcohol hand sanitizer will work in a pinch. See *Quick Facts: Wash Your Hands*

TIP #4: Microwave your food thoroughly. When microwaving a frozen meal, for best results follow the package directions exactly. For maximum efficiency, heat your food thoroughly (no cold spots!) by placing the container on the outer edge of the carousel. Leftovers must be cooked to 165° F to kill off harmful bacteria.

TIP #5: Thaw foods properly. Frozen foods must be thawed in the fridge or microwave—not the countertop.

TIP #6: Refrigerate leftovers right away. Got lunch leftovers? Refrigerate perishable items promptly at 40 degrees or below. Leaving them on your desk for an hour—or worse, all day—creates a veritable breeding ground for your food to develop harmful bacteria.

TIP #7: Toss leftovers before they spoil. Four is the maximum number of days you can keep leftovers in the fridge.

BONUS TIP #8: Eating out has its own dangers as well. According to research from CSPI, you're twice as likely to get food poisoning from a restaurant than you are preparing food at home. The top 3 contributors to foodborne illness are personal hygiene, improper handling/unsanitary prep spaces (cross-contamination) and poor temperature control. It's never a bad idea to be aware of everything, from how service workers handle and serve food to how clean a restaurant's restroom or dining room is. You can also check the health department's inspection record online.

www.stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/food-safety-by-state/



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