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Traveling with Food to Gatherings of Family and Friends

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It's a time-honored tradition for many people to bring food to gatherings, such as holiday meals. How do you decide who brings what or how to travel with food if you're asked to bring something?

When assigning foods or deciding what to take, consider type of food and distance to travel. Remember the **2-hour rule**: Avoid leaving perishable foods at room temperature longer than 2 hours (1 hour in warmer seasons when the temperature is over 90 F). The 2 hours includes preparation time for foods that aren't cooked or foods that need more preparation steps after cooking.

People traveling a long distance might bring non-perishables such as rolls, breads and cookies. Those traveling about a half hour or less can more safely bring perishable foods such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products or foods containing these items. Nearer relatives also are a better choice for providing salads, relishes and vegetables.

When traveling with food, keep HOT foods hot (140 F or higher) by wrapping them in foil, and then in heavy towels. Or, carry them in insulated wrappers or containers designed to keep food hot.

Place COLD foods in a cooler with ice or freezer packs or an insulated container with a cold pack so they remain at 40 F or lower, especially if traveling over a half hour.

On arrival, place cold foods in the refrigerator. Place hot foods in an oven hot enough to keep the food at an internal temperature of 140 F or above; use a food thermometer to assure the food stays at a safe internal temperature. Plan to serve foods shortly after guests have arrived.

Another possibility is to carry all perishable food in an ice chest and come early. Then prepare the food after you arrive.

Remember: If you travel with food, take a detour around the "danger zone." Keep hot foods hot (140 F or higher) and cold foods cold (40 F or lower).

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