

# Food & Drinks in the Laboratory

Eating a snack, or sipping a drink can lead to the accidental ingestion of chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants, causing acute poisoning or chronic illness. The use of laboratory refrigerators, glassware, and utensils for food or drink also poses a severe cross-contamination risk, as these items may have been exposed to hazardous substances. To help prevent the accidental ingestion of chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants, you should always wash your hands thoroughly after handling lab materials and before consuming food or drink outside of the lab.



## The Consequences of Non-Compliance

OSHA's 29 CFR 1910.1450 (Occupational Exposure to Hazardous Chemicals in Laboratories) and 29 CFR 1910.141 (Sanitation) prohibit food, drink, and related items in labs where hazardous substances are present. FDNY fire code and Columbia University Policy reinforces this by requiring labs to remain free of activities that could lead to chemical exposures. See page 5 (1.3.2) in the university's Chemical Hygiene Plan (CHP) for more information.

Evidence of eating and drinking in laboratories can result in serious consequences, including citations or fines from regulatory agencies like the FDNY and OSHA, or corrective actions being assigned during an internal EH&S inspection.

## Smart Storage and Safe Practices

Storing hazardous substances in food and beverage containers can lead to accidental ingestion and severe health consequences. To ensure a safe laboratory environment, all hazardous substances should be stored in purpose-built chemical containers that are clearly labeled with their contents, and hazards.

To keep our lab environment safe and compliant, we must store and consume all food and drinks in designated, non-laboratory areas. These spaces should be physically separate from the lab and have a closed door. So where *can* you eat and drink?

- ✓ Designated break rooms, lounges, or kitchenettes located outside of the lab.
- ✓ Offices or private desks located outside the lab.
- ✓ Hallway tables or counters.

## Proper Food Storage:

- Do not store food or drinks for human consumption in laboratory refrigerators, freezers, or cold rooms.
- Microwaves designated for research purposes must never be used to heat food or beverages.
- Only use refrigerators that are clearly labeled "For Food Use Only."
- If you need space for food or drink, speak with your PI or department about placing a designated table outside of the lab for personal use.



## Fun FAQ!

Is coffee considered a chemical?

*Yes, coffee is a mixture of chemicals (caffeine, acids, oils, etc.). Regardless, keep your mug outside the lab!*

Have more questions? Reach out to EH&S at [Labsafety@columbia.edu](mailto:Labsafety@columbia.edu) or give us a call

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