



Food Code Implementation Guidance from the  
Washington State Department of Health  
Environmental Health Division  
Food Safety Program

# Hair Restraints



**Food Code  
References:**  
2.402.11

**Definition:**



**Food Employee:**  
An individual working with unpackaged food, food equipment or utensils, or food-contact surfaces.



**FOOD CODE REQUIREMENT**

The Food Code requires that FOOD EMPLOYEES wear hair restraints that are designed and worn to effectively keep their hair from contacting exposed food; clean equipment, utensils, and linens; and unwrapped single-service or single-use articles.

The purpose of this provision is both to prevent hair from contacting food and food-contact surfaces and to deter FOOD EMPLOYEES from touching their hair.

**CLARIFICATION:**

**What would be considered a hair restraint?**

Hair restraints may include items such as hats, hair covering and nets, beard restraints, and clothing that covers body hair. Depending on the hair style, they may also include rubber bands and clips that effectively restrain the hair.

**Does all hair need to be covered or restrained?**

No. The code requires hair be effectively restrained. For instance, if the hair style (e.g., short hair) effectively keeps hair from contacting food or food-contact surfaces and deters the FOOD EMPLOYEES from touching their hair, a hair restraint is not required.

**Are there any food employees who aren't required to restrain their hair?**

Yes. This provision does not apply to FOOD EMPLOYEES such as counter staff who only serve beverages and wrapped or packaged foods, hostesses, and wait staff if they present a minimal risk of contaminating exposed food; clean equipment, utensils, and linens; and unwrapped single-service or single-use articles. This exemption would apply to most wait staff, table bussers, bartenders, baristas, grocery checkers and grocery courtesy clerks.

**Can customers get sick if hair touches their food?**

Although hair in food is a periodic source of customer complaints, it is unlikely that customers will get sick from hair. Pathogenic *Staphylococcus* bacteria may be present on the hair or scalp, but they are generally not in sufficient numbers to cause foodborne illness. However, hair is an undesirable adulterant and all reasonable steps should be taken to keep it out of food.

NOTE: This fact sheet is a compilation of major food safety rules regarding the given topic and is not designed to replace reading the Food Code.



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