



# Storing in the Fridge and Freezer

Keep your food safe and cool

The fridge and freezer are definitely the stars of kitchen appliances. These two food storage spaces keep food fresh, safe, and tasting great longer. When used correctly, the fridge or freezer can save you time, money, and help prevent food from going bad. To make sure you have some important information, we have answered several common questions.

## Refrigerator Questions

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### What is a safe refrigerator temperature?

For safety, refrigerators should be set to a temperature of 40 °F or below. Some refrigerators have a built-in thermometer to measure their temperature. You can also use an appliance thermometer to monitor the temperature. This can be critical in the event of a power outage. When the power goes back on, if the refrigerator is still 40 °F, the food is safe. Foods held at temperatures above 40 °F for more than 2 hours should not be eaten. Appliance thermometers are designed to work at cold temperatures. Be sure refrigerator/freezer doors are closed tightly at all times. Don't open refrigerator/freezer doors more often than necessary and close them as soon as possible.

### Can hot foods go in the fridge?

Hot food can be placed in the refrigerator. Or, it can first be chilled in an ice or cold water bath before refrigerating. Cover foods to keep in moisture. Tight covers also prevent them from picking up odors from other foods.

A large pot of food like soup or stew should be divided into small portions. Then the portions should be put in shallow containers before being refrigerated. A large cut of meat or whole poultry should be divided into smaller pieces. Place the smaller pieces in shallow containers before refrigerating.

### Does it matter where the food is placed in the fridge?

The temperature in a refrigerator should be 40 °F or below throughout the unit. That way any place is safe for storage of any food. Raw meat, poultry, and seafood should be in a sealed container or wrapped securely. Choose a lower shelf for these items. This will prevent raw juices from contaminating other foods.

# What are the special compartments for?

Some refrigerators have special features such as **adjustable shelves, door bins, crispers, and meat/cheese drawers**. These are designed to make storage of foods more convenient.

**Sealed crisper drawers** provide safe storage for fruits and vegetables. Vegetables need higher humidity conditions. Fruits need lower humidity conditions. Some crispers have controls to adjust each drawer's humidity level.

A **meat drawer** maximizes the storage time of meats and cheeses. Additional cool air is directed into the drawer to keep items very cold without freezing.

# What can safely be stored in the door?

Don't store foods that spoil easily in the door. Eggs should be stored in the carton on a shelf. The temperature of the storage bins in the door change more than the temperature in the cabinet. Keep the door closed as much as possible.

## Storage Times for Refrigerated Foods

Ground Meat, Ground Poultry, and Stew Meat.....	1-2 Days
Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb, and Pork)	
Steaks, Chops, and Roasts.....	3-5 Days
Chicken or Turkey.....	1-2 Days
Store-Cooked Dinners and Entrees.....	3-4 Days
Commercial Brand Vacuum-Packed Dinners with USDA Seal, Unopened.....	2 Weeks
Cooked Meat, Poultry, and Fish Leftovers.....	3-4 Days
Fresh Fish and Shellfish.....	1-2 Days
Fresh Eggs, in Shell.....	3-5 Weeks
Raw Egg Yolks or Whites.....	2-4 Days
Hard-Cooked Egg.....	1 Week
Liquid Pasteurized Eggs or Egg Substitutes.....	Unopened, 10 Days; Opened, 3 Days
Cooked Egg Dishes.....	3-4 Days

# Freezer Questions

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## **What prevents freezer burn?**

Proper packaging helps keep quality and prevent freezer burn. It is safe to freeze meat or poultry directly in its original packaging. However, the wrap will let air in and the quality may diminish over time. For very long storage, overwrap these packages as you would any food for long-term storage. It is not necessary to rinse meat and poultry. Freeze unopened vacuum packages as is. If a package has accidentally torn or has opened while food is in the freezer, the food is still safe to use.

## **What can be frozen?**

You can freeze almost any food. Some exceptions are canned food or eggs in shells. However, once the food (such as a ham) is out of the can, you may freeze it.

Being able to freeze food and being pleased with the quality after defrosting are two different things. Some foods simply don't freeze well. Examples are mayonnaise, cream sauce, and lettuce. Raw meat and poultry keep their quality longer than cooked meats because moisture is lost during cooking.

## **Is frozen food safe?**

Food stored constantly at 0 °F will always be safe. Only the quality suffers when stored in the freezer for a long time. Freezing preserves food for long periods because it prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause food to spoil and foodborne illness.

## **Does freezing destroy bacteria and parasites?**

Freezing to 0 °F inactivates any microbes — bacteria, yeasts, and molds — present in food. Once thawed, however, these microbes can again become active. They can then multiply under the right conditions to levels that can lead to foodborne illness. You must handle thawed items as you would any perishable food.

## **When is the best time to freeze foods?**

Freshness and quality at the time of freezing affect the condition of frozen foods. It is best to freeze at peak quality. These thawed foods will taste better than foods frozen near the end of their useful life. So freeze items you won't use quickly sooner rather than later. Store all foods at 0° F or lower to retain vitamin content, color, flavor, and texture.

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