

Consumer and Family Sciences



Department of Foods and
Nutrition



Spotlight on Refrigerator Storage

Food costs money, so it is just good sense to keep the quality in the food you buy. Knowing how to store food properly and how long it will keep brings many benefits.

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Four ways to win with proper food storage

- Food will be safe to eat.
- Desirable flavor and texture will be retained.
- High level of nutrients will be maintained.
- Money won't be wasted on spoiled food.

Safety First. Bacterial infections account for 67 percent of the food poisoning in the United States. The three basic types of bacteria responsible for most cases are Staphylococcus, Clostridium perfringens, and Salmonella. Staphylococcus is transferred to foods by humans during preparation. Clostridium perfringens and Salmonella can be transferred this way or carried by foods themselves.

Normally these bacteria do not cause trouble, but if given favorable conditions, they can multiply to dangerous levels in a few hours.

Chief factors contributing to bacterial growth and possible food poisoning are:

Temperature. Between 40° F and 145° F.

Time. Three to four hours in this temperature range.

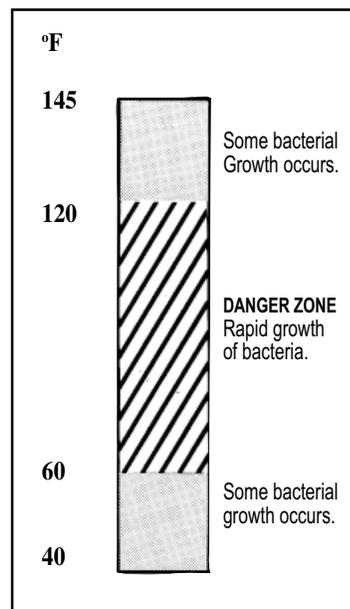
Food. Low-acid foods such as meat, cooked vegetables, and egg dishes are particularly risky.

Moisture. Bacteria need all these factors to grow and increase. If any one is missing, bacteria will not grow as fast.

To prevent bacterial growth

- Don't handle food carelessly.
- Keep hands, utensils, and cutting boards well-scrubbed (otherwise you can easily recontaminate cooked food).
- Cook or serve food as soon as possible after removing it from storage.
- Serve hot foods **HOT**. Serve cold foods **COLD**.
- Refrigerate food immediately after meal is over.

Don't depend on appearance, taste, or smell of food to tell you when it is unsafe. Contaminated foods that can cause food poisoning may look fine and have no off-flavor or odor.



Refrigerator Storage Chart

Temperature. From 34° F to 40° F is best. Above 40° F, foods spoil rapidly. Check temperature with a refrigerator thermometer or an outdoor thermometer.

Time. Use foods quickly — don't depend on maximum storage time.

Packaging. Use foil, plastic wrap or bags, or airtight containers.

General Care. Clean refrigerator regularly to cut down on food odors. Remove spoiled foods immediately so that decay cannot be passed to other foods.

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 37°F	Handling Hints
Dairy Products		
Butter	1-2 weeks	Wrap or cover tightly.
Margarine	4-6 months	
Buttermilk	3-5 days	Cover tightly. Flavor not affected if buttermilk separates; remix before serving.
Cheese:		Keep all cheese lightly packaged in moisture-resistant wrap.
cottage, ricotta	5 days	
cream, Neufchatel	2 weeks	
Hard and wax-coated (Cheddar, Edam, Gouda, Swiss, brick, etc.) large pieces:		
unopened	3-6 months	
opened	3-4 weeks	
sliced	2 weeks	
Parmesan, Romano grated (opened)	2 months	Refrigerate after opening.
process (opened)	3-4 weeks	Refrigerate slices. Refrigerate loaves and jars after opened. Most squeeze packages and aerosol cans don't need refrigeration (check label).
Cream:		
light, heavy, half-and-half	3 days	Cover tightly. To avoid spreading bacteria into leftover cream, don't return unused cream to original container.
coffee lightener (liquid)	3 weeks	Don't return unused portion to original container.



Foods that need special care

Bacteria grow best in low-acid foods (meat, fish, poultry, milk, eggs, and cooked vegetables). Acid foods (fruits, tomatoes, and pickles) seldom cause food poisoning.

Foods handled a great deal during chopping, slicing, or deboning are likely to become contaminated. The combination of low acidity and much handling makes some foods more suspect than others. Potato salad, chicken pies, and stuffing are prime examples.

To be on the safe side

- Stuff poultry just before roasting.
- Separate leftover meat, poultry, stuffing, and gravy. Refrigerate each immediately.
- Use cracked eggs only in recipes in which they will be thoroughly cooked (hard-cooked or baked, not in meringue).
- Refrigerate perishable foods at 40° F or below.

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 37°F	Handling Hints
Dips, sour-cream, etc.:		
commercial	2 weeks	Keep tightly covered.
homemade	2 days	Keep tightly covered.
Eggs:		
in-shell	2-3 weeks	Store covered in carton. Keep small end down to center yolks.
whites	3 days	Store in covered container.
yolks	3 days	Cover yolks with water; store in covered container.
Milk:		
evaporated (opened)	4-5 days	Keep covered.
homogenized, reconstituted dry nonfat, skimmed	5 days	Keep containers tightly closed. Don't return unused milk to original container.
sweetened, condensed (opened)	4-5 days	Keep covered.
Sour cream	2 weeks	Keep covered.
Whipped topping:		
in aerosol can	3 months	
prepared from mix	3 days	Keep covered.
bought frozen (once thawed)	2 weeks	Keep covered.
Yogurt	7-10 days	Keep covered.

Fruits and Vegetables – Fresh

Fruits:		
bananas		Refrigerate only when fully ripe.
apples	1-3 weeks	Discard bruised or decayed fruit. Don't wash before storing — moisture encourages spoilage. Store in crisper or moisture resistant bag or wrap.
berries, cherries	1-2 days	
citrus fruit	1 week	
Citrus juice:		
bottled, reconstituted	6 days	Keep fruit juice tightly covered.
frozen, canned		Transfer canned juice to glass or plastic container if not used up in 1 day.
melons	1 week	Wrap uncut cantaloupe and honeydew to prevent odor spreading to other foods.
other	3-5 days	Wrap cut surfaces of citrus fruit and cantaloupe to prevent vitamin C loss.



Food	Recommended Storage Time at 37°F	Handling Hints
Vegetables:		
asparagus, corn in husks	1-2 days	Keep moist.
beans, green or wax	1-2 days	Keep in crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag.
beets, carrots, radishes	1-2 weeks	Remove leafy tops; keep in crisper.
cabbage, celery	1-2 weeks	Keep in crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag.
lettuce, head (unwashed)	5-7 days	Store in moisture-resistant wrap, bag, or lettuce keeper.
lettuce, head (washed, thoroughly drained)	3-5 days	Store away from other vegetables and fruits to prevent russet spotting.
mushrooms	1-2 days	Do not wash before storing.
onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes		Refrigeration not needed.
shredded cabbage, leaf and bibb lettuce, salad greens	1-2 days	Keep in moisture-resistant wrap or bag.
tomatoes, ripe	1-2 days	Ripen tomatoes at room temperature away from direct sunlight; then refrigerate.
unshelled peas, lima beans, spinach	3-5 days	Keep in crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag.

Meat, Fish and Poultry — Fresh Uncooked

Meats — beef, lamb, pork and veal:

chops	2-3 days
ground meat	1-2 days
roasts	2-4 days
steaks	2-4 days
stew meat	1-2 days
variety meats (liver, heart, etc.)	1 day

Poultry: ready-to-cook chicken, duck, or turkey 1-2 days

Fish and shellfish:

fresh cleaned fish, including steaks and fillets, and shucked clams, oysters, scallops, and shrimp 1 day

clams, crab, lobster in shell 2 days

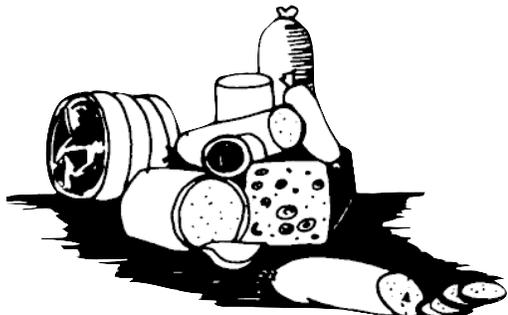
Store in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

All meat, poultry and fish, when bought in plastic wrapping (from self-serve counters), should be stored in these packages. If not purchased from self-serve counters, remove from package and wrap loosely in waxed paper.



Store in coldest part of refrigerator.

Cook only live shellfish.

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 37°F	Handling Hints
Cured and smoked meats:		
bacon	5-7 days	Keep wrapped. Store in coldest part of refrigerator or in meat keeper. Times are for opened packages of sliced meats. Unopened vacuum packs keep about 2 weeks.
bologna loaves, liverwurst	4-6 days	
corned beef	5-7 days	
dried beef	10-12 days	
dry and semi-dry sausage (salami, etc.)	2-3 days	
frankfurters	4-5 days	
Hams:		
whole	1 week	
canned (unopened)	6 months	
Liver sausage	4-5 days	
Luncheon meats	3-5 days	
Sausage:		
fresh	1-2 days	
smoked	3-5 days	
Other Foods		
Canned goods:		
fruits, opened	1 week	If not used in 1 day, transfer to glass or plastic container to avoid metallic taste. Cover and refrigerate.
vegetables, opened	2-3 days	
pudding, custard (opened)	1-2 days	Keep covered.
Leftover gravy and broth	2 days	Keep covered.
Refrigerated biscuits, rolls, pastries, cookie dough	Expiration date on label.	Don't store in refrigerator door; temperature fluctuation and jarring lower quality.

Related publications

Contact the Extension office in your county for copies of the following related publications, or download pdf files directly from the World Wide Web.

CFS-422-W, Spotlight on Freezer Storage
www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-422-W.pdf

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