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Keep It Chilled

Did you know that illness-causing bacteria grow in perishable foods? That is why it is important to refrigerate them within two hours of being out of a refrigerator or cooler. Cold temperatures slow the growth of harmful bacteria.



Your Refrigerator is a Critical Tool for Keeping Food Safe

- ◆ Pack your refrigerator carefully. To properly chill food and slow bacteria growth, cold air must be allowed to circulate in your refrigerator. It is important not to over-stuff your fridge.
- ◆ Keep the temperature of your refrigerator between 40°F and 32°F. Use an appliance thermometer to help you know, if your refrigerator is cold enough.
- ◆ As the temperature of your refrigerator approaches 32°F, ice crystals can begin to form and lower the quality of foods such as raw fruits, vegetables, and eggs. A thermometer will help you determine whether you are too close to this temperature.
- ◆ Make sure to get perishable foods into the refrigerator or freezer within two hours. In the summer months, cut this down to one hour.
- ◆ Remember to store leftovers within two hours as well. If you divide leftovers into several clean, shallow containers, the food will chill faster.
- ◆ Freezing does not destroy harmful bacteria, but it does keep food safe until you can cook it.
- ◆ Your freezer should be 0°F or below. Appliance thermometers let you know if the freezer is cold enough. *To thaw your food safely, see tips on the following page.*

Thawing

There are three safe ways to defrost food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave.

Defrosting Do's

1. Defrost food in the refrigerator. This is the safest method for all foods.
2. Short on time? Thaw meat and poultry in airtight packaging in cold water, if it will be used immediately. Change the water every 30 minutes, so the food continues to thaw in cool water.
3. Defrost food in the microwave only if you are going to cook it immediately.

Defrosting Don'ts

- ◆ Never defrost food at room temperature. Food left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours may enter the **Danger Zone**—the unsafe temperatures between 40°F and 140°F. Bacteria multiply quickly in the danger zone.
- ◆ Don't defrost food in hot water.

Picnics, Barbecues, and Buffets

When serving cold food at a picnic, barbeque or buffet, keep these "chilling" tips in mind:

- ✓ Keep cold foods at 40°F or below.
- ✓ Keep all perishable foods chilled right up until serving time.

Don't get careless with picnics and other outdoor food events. Unless you are absolutely sure about the safety of the food, throw away any leftovers.

- ✓ Place containers of cold food on ice for serving to make sure they stay cold.
- ✓ It's very important to keep custards, cream pies, and cakes with whipped cream or cream cheese frostings refrigerated. Don't serve them if refrigeration is not possible.

On the Road

When traveling with food, be aware that time, temperature, and a cold source are key to keeping food safe.

- ◆ Always use ice or cold packs and fill your cooler with food. A full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures for longer than one that is partially filled.
- ◆ Put a cooler and some ice blocks in the trunk of your car when you go grocery shopping. Even 20 minutes in a hot car eats into that "one hour" rule. Refrigerate all perishable foods immediately upon getting home.
- ◆ When doing errands, make the grocery store your last stop.
- ◆ If you are taking home leftovers from a restaurant, they should be refrigerated within two hours of serving.
- ◆ If you are going to a farmers' market, farm stand, or pick-your-own field, take a cooler along. Don't store fresh produce in the trunk of your car.