

Safe Food Storage: The Refrigerator and Freezer

For best results, use packaging designed for refrigerator/freezer storage. This extends shelf life and protects food from damage, contamination, and deterioration.

- Use foil, plastic wrap, plastic bags, or airtight containers designed for refrigerating or freezing food. Moisture- and vapor-proof materials are best.
- Clean your refrigerator regularly to reduce food odors and cross contamination. Remove spoiled foods immediately so decay cannot pass to other foods.
- Refrigerator temperature between 34 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit is best. Perishable foods stored at temperatures above 40°F spoil rapidly and may allow pathogen growth. Check temperatures with a refrigerator thermometer.
- Keep your freezer clean and at 0°F or lower.
- Use foods quickly. Don't depend on maximum storage time. Label and date the package for easy identification.

BREADS, PASTRIES, AND CAKES

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|--|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Unbaked yeast dough, rolls, and bread | 2-3 days | 1 month | Longer storage causes yeast to become inactivated, and the gluten weakens. |
| Partially baked cinnamon rolls | | 2 months | |
| Baked quick breads | | 2 months | |
| Baked muffins | | 6-12 months | |
| Baked breads without preservatives | 2-3 weeks | 2-3 months | Refrigeration is recommended to prevent mold growth, but it will increase staling due to moisture reduction. |
| Unfrosted doughnuts | | 2-4 months | |
| Waffles | | 1 month | |
| Unbaked fruit pies | 1-2 days | 2-4 months | |
| Baked fruit pies | 2-3 days | 6-8 months | |
| Pumpkin or chiffon pies | 2-3 days | 1-2 months | |
| Baked cookies | | 6-12 months | Most cookies can be stored at room temperature 2-3 weeks. Refrigerate high moisture cookies (i.e. custard-type bar cookies) |
| Freezer pie shells | | 12 months (unopened) 2 months (opened) | |
| Cookie dough | | 3 months | |
| Unbaked cakes (batter) | | 1 month | Use double-acting baking powder for best results. |
| Frosted baked cakes | | 1 month | |
| Unfrosted baked cakes | | 2-4 months | |
| Foam cakes (i.e. Angel Food) | | 6-12 months | |
| Fruit cakes | | 6-12 months | |
| Refrigerated biscuits, rolls, pastries, cookie dough | Expiration date on package label | Do not freeze | Store in refrigerator for best storage life. |

DAIRY PRODUCTS – REAL AND SUBSTITUTES

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|--|---|--|--|
| Butter | 1-2 weeks | 12 months | Wrap or cover tightly. |
| Margarine | 4-6 months | 12 months | Wrap or cover tightly. |
| Buttermilk | 3-5 days | Do not freeze | Cover tightly. Remix before using. Check date on carton. |
| Cheese Cottage, ricotta Cream, Neufchatel Hard and wax-coated in large pieces; Cheddar, Edam, Gouda, Swiss, Brick Sliced Soft cream cheese Parmesan, Romano Processed (opened) Shredded cheese | 5-7 days 2 weeks 2-3 months, unopened 2-3 weeks, opened 2 weeks 5-6 days, opened 6 months 3-4 weeks 3-4 weeks | 4 weeks Do not freeze 6-8 months 6-8 months | Keep all cheese tightly packaged in moisture-resistant wrap. If outside of hard cheese gets moldy, cut away ½-1 inch around the mold. Discard cheese with heavy mold. Many cheeses can be frozen but will become crumbly. Refer to “best when purchased by” dates for best quality. Refrigerate slices of processed cheese as well as loaves and jars of processed cheese and cheese food after opening. Refrigerate loaves and jars after opening. Most squeeze packages and aerosol cans don’t need refrigeration, but check the label. Keep shredded cheese refrigerated. Always be aware of “best if used by” or “sell by” dates. |
| Dips Commercial Homemade | 2 weeks 2 days | | Keep tightly covered. |
| Milk Evaporated (opened) Fresh homogenized or reconstituted nonfat, dry Reconstituted evaporated milk Sweetened, condensed (opened) Whole milk | 4-5 days 5 days 3-5 days 4-5 days 5 days | Freezing not recommended 5 days | Store in covered or capped containers. To help prevent spoilage, don’t return unused milk to original containers. Follow “sell by” date on containers for best quality and safety. |
| Sour cream | 2 weeks | Freezing not recommended | Keep covered. |
| Whipped topping Aerosol can Prepared from mix Frozen, premade | 3 months 3 days 2-3 weeks | Freezing not recommended 14 months | Keep covered. May be refrozen four to five times if thawed in the refrigerator. |
| Yogurt | 7-10 days | Freezing not recommended | Keep covered and refrigerated. Follow the “use by” date on the package, or up to two weeks after the “sell by” date. Yogurt may separate when frozen. |

FRUITS AND JUICES

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|----------|-------------------------|----------------|---|
| Apples | 1 month | 8-12 months | Discard bruised or decayed fruit. Don’t wash before storing to prevent spoilage. Store in the crisper drawer or moisture-resistant bag or wrap. |
| Apricots | 3-5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Avocados | 5 days | 8-12 months | |

FRUITS AND JUICES

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|---|
| Bananas | | | Refrigerate or freeze only when fully ripe. Skin will darken. |
| Berries | 2-3 days | 8-12 months | |
| Canned fruits | 2-4 days (opened) | 2-3 months | |
| Cherries | 2-3 days | 8-12 months | |
| Citrus fruit | 2 weeks | 4-6 months | |
| Cranberries | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Guavas | 1-2 days | 8-12 months | |
| Juices – canned, bottled, or reconstituted | | | Thaw in the refrigerator. Keep fruit juice tightly covered. Do not store in cans after opening. Keep refrigerated. Do not use after the “use by” date on the package. |
| Pre-mixed, full-strength fruit juice | 6 days (diluted) | 8 months | |
| Real lemon juice | 12 months | | |
| Kiwis | 6-8 days | 4-6 months | |
| Mangos | Ripen at room temperature | 8-12 months | |
| Melons | 5 days | 8-12 months | Wrap uncut cantaloupe and honeydew to prevent odor from spreading to other foods. |
| Nectarines | 5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Papayas | Ripen at room temperature | 8-12 months | |
| Peaches | 2-3 days | 8-12 months | |
| Pears | 5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Pineapples | 5-7 days | 4-6 months | |
| Plantains | Ripen at room temperature | 8-12 months | |
| Plums | 5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Rhubarb | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Frozen juice | | | |
| Concentrate | Do not refrigerate | 2 years | |
| Reconstituted | 6 days | 6-12 months | |

FRESH VEGETABLES

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|--|
| Artichokes | 2-3 days | | Freezes poorly |
| Asparagus | 2-3 days | 8-12 months | |
| Beans – green or wax | 1-2 days | 8-12 months | |
| Beets | 2 weeks | 8-12 months | |
| Broccoli | 3-5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Brussels sprouts | 3-5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Cabbage | 1 week | 8-12 months | Keep in crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag. |
| Canned vegetables | 1-4 days (opened) | 2-3 months | |
| Carrots | 2 weeks | 8-12 months | |
| Cauliflower | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Celery | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Corn, in husks | 1-2 days | 8-12 months | Keep moist |

FRESH VEGETABLES

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Cucumbers | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Eggplant | 2-3 days | 8-12 months | |
| Frozen vegetables | Do not refrigerate | 8 months | Once prepared, store covered in the refrigerator up to two days. |
| Greens | 3-5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Kohlrabi | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Lettuce, head Unwashed Washed, thoroughly | 5-7 days 3-5 days | | Store in moisture-resistant wrap, bag or lettuce keeper. Wrap and store away from other drained fruits and vegetables to prevent rusted spotting. |
| Lima beans | 3-5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Mushrooms | 1-2 days | 8-12 months | Do not wash before storing. |
| Onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes | | | Do not refrigerate. |
| Okra | 3-5 days | 8-12 months | |
| Parsley | 2-3 days | 3-4 months | |
| Peas Shelled Unshelled | 3-5 days 3-5 days | 8-12 months | Keep in the crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag. |
| Peppers | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Radishes | 2 weeks | | Freeze poorly. |
| Shredded cabbage, leaf and bibb lettuce, salad greens | 1-2 days | | Keep in moisture-resistant wrap or bag. |
| Squash Summer Winter | 3-5 days Store in a dry place | 8-12 months 8-12 months | |
| Tomatillos | 1 week | 8-12 months | |
| Tomatoes (ripe) | 1-2 days | 8-12 months | Ripen tomatoes at room temperature away from direct sunlight; then refrigerate |

FRESH UNCOOKED MEAT AND POULTRY

Refrigerate fresh meat and poultry in the original wrapping from the store. To freeze, place the packaged meat in another freezer-safe container for better quality. Do not wash meat and poultry before preparation to prevent cross contamination.

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------|
| Red Meats | | | |
| Chops | 3-5 days | 3-4 months | |
| Ground meat | 1-2 days | 3-4 months | |
| Roasts | 3-5 days | 6-12 months | |
| Steaks | 3-5 days | 6-12 months | |
| Stew meat | 1-2 days | 3-4 months | |
| Bratwurst, precooked | 5-7 days | 2-3 months | |
| Bratwurst, fresh | 2-3 days | 2-3 months | |
| Variety meats (liver, heart, etc.) | 1-2 days | 1-2 months | |
| Poultry | | | |
| Chicken or turkey, whole | 1-2 days | 1 year | |
| Chicken or turkey, pieces | 1-2 days | 9 months | |
| Duck or goose, whole | 1-2 days | 6 months | |
| Giblets | 1-2 days | 3-4 months | |
| Ground | 1-2 days | 6 months | |

COOKED MEAT AND POULTRY

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|---|--|---|--|
| Meat leftovers Cooked meat and meat dishes Gravy and meat broth | 3-4 days 1-2 days | 2-3 months 2-3 months | Keep covered. Keep covered. |
| Poultry, leftovers Fried chicken Cooked poultry dishes Pieces, plain Chicken nuggets, patties Pieces covered with broth, gravy | 3-4 days 3-4 days 3-4 days 1-2 days 1-2 days | 4 months 4-6 months 1 month 1-3 months 6 months | Separate meat and liquids and place in shallow containers for quick cooling. |

FISH AND SHELLFISH

Refrigerate fresh fish and shellfish in the original wrapping from the store. To freeze, place the packaged fish and shellfish in another freezer-safe container for better quality. Do not wash fish and shellfish before preparation to prevent cross contamination.

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F (Fresh: Never frozen or previously frozen and home refrigerated) | Freezer at 0°F (Purchased fresh and home frozen) | Freezer at 0°F (Purchased commercially frozen for freezer storage) |
|---|--|--|---|
| Fish fillets/steaks – Lean Cod, flounder Haddock, halibut Pollock, ocean perch Sea trout, rockfish | 36 hours 36 hours 36 hours 36 hours | 6-8 months 6-8 months 4 months 4 months | 10-12 months 10-12 months 8-9 months 8-9 months |
| Fish fillets/steaks – fatty Mullet, smelt Salmon (cleaned) | 36 hours 36 hours | | 6-8 months 7-9 months |
| Shellfish Dungeness crab Snow crab Blue crabmeat (fresh) Blue crabmeat (pasteurized) Cocktail claws King crab Surimi seafoods Shrimp Oysters, shucked Clams, shucked Lobster, live Lobster, tail meat | 5 days 5 days 5-7 days 60 days 5 days 7 days 2 weeks 4 days 4-7 days 5 days 1-2 days 4-5 days | 6 months 6 months 4 months 4 months 9 months 9 months 9 months 5 months 6 months | 6 months 6 months 12 months 10-12 months 9 months 8 months |
| Breaded seafoods Shrimp Scallops Fish sticks Portions | | 8 months 10 months | 12 months 16 months 18 months 18 months |
| Smoked fish Herring Salmon, Whitefish | 3-4 days 5-8 days | 2 months 2 months | |

CURED AND SMOKED MEATS

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|---|---|--|--|
| Bacon | 7 days | 1 month | Keep wrapped. Store in coldest part of refrigerator or in meat keeper. Times are for opened packages. Follow dates on packages. |
| Bologna, liverwurst | 4-6 days | | |
| Dried beef | 10-12 days | | |
| Hotdogs and lunch meats Hotdogs, opened Hotdogs, unopened Lunch meats, opened Lunch meats, unopened Sausage, raw Smoked breakfast links, patties Hard sausage – pepperoni, jerky sticks | 1 week 2 weeks 3-5 days 2 weeks 1-2 days 7 days 2-3 weeks | 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months | Freeze in freezer wrap. |
| Ham, corned beef Corned beef, in pouch with juices Ham, canned (unopened – label says keep refrigerated) Ham, fully cooked, whole Ham, fully cooked, half Ham, fully cooked, slices Liver sausage | 5-7 days 6-12 weeks 7 days 3-5 days 3-4 days 4-6 days | 1 month 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months | Drained, wrapped Store ham in refrigerator unless label indicates refrigeration is not needed. Once canned ham is opened, use within 3 to 5 days. |

BABY FOOD

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|--|---|--|---|
| Liquids Expressed breast milk Formula | 24 hours 2 days | 3-6 months Not recommended | For shelf storage of unopened cans of formula, observe the “use by” dates printed on containers. Store evaporated milk up to 12 months. Heat liquid under warm running water, not the microwave oven. Gently swirl the bottle before testing the temperature on the top of your hand. Discard any unused milk left in a bottle. |
| Solids (opened or freshly made) Strained fruits and vegetables Strained meats and eggs Meat/vegetable combinations Homemade baby foods | 2-3 days 1 day 1-2 days 1-2 days | 6-8 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 3-4 months | Observe the “use by” date for shelf storage of unopened jars. Check to see that the safety button in the lid is down. If the jar does not “pop” when opened or is not sealed safely, do not use. Do not heat meats, eggs or jars of food in the microwave. Transfer food from jars to bowls or a heating dish. For 4 ounces of food, microwave on high for 15 seconds; stir and let stand 30 seconds. Stir and test the temperature of the foods before feeding the baby. Don't feed the baby from the jar. |

WILD GAME

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F (Thawed: Never frozen or previously frozen and home refrigerated) | Freezer at 0°F (Purchased fresh and home frozen) | Freezer at 0°F (Purchased commercially frozen for freezer storage) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Venison | 3-5 days | 3-4 months | 6-12 months |
| Rabbit, squirrel | 1-2 days | 12 months | |
| Wild duck, pheasant, goose (whole) | 1-2 days | 6 months | |

OTHER FOODS

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F | Comments |
|--|---|--|--|
| Canned Goods Puddings, custard (opened) Gravy and broth Meats Sauce, tomato-based | 1-2 days 2 days 2-3 days 5 days | 2-3 months 2-3 months | Transfer food to glass or plastic containers after opening. Keep covered. Texture will be softer after freezing, but is acceptable in sauce, soups, or stews. Acidic foods should be transferred to glass or plastic containers to avoid metallic taste if stored for more than one or two days. |
| Miscellaneous Soups, stews Sandwiches Casseroles Leftover cooked food Ground spices Candies Fats, oils, salad dressings (opened) Mayonnaise (opened) TV dinners, frozen casseroles | 2-3 days 2-3 days 1-2 days See other charts 6 months Not necessary Several months 2-3 months 2 days | 4-6 months 1 month 1 month 1 month 6-12 months 3-6 months 3-4 months | Can be stored in cupboard. Keep frozen until ready to serve. |
| Deli or vacuum-packed products Store-prepared or homemade salads (egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni) Pre-stuffed pork and lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed with dressing Store-cooked convenience meals Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal, unopened | 3-5 days 1 day 1-2 days 2 weeks | | Freezing not recommended for any of these products. |

EGGS

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Raw eggs in shell | 3 to 5 weeks | Do not freeze. Instead, beat yolks and whites together; then freeze. |
| Raw egg whites | 2 to 4 days | 12 months |
| Raw egg yolks | 2 to 4 days | Yolks do not freeze well. |
| Raw egg accidentally frozen in shell | Use immediately after thawing. | Keep frozen; then refrigerate to thaw. |
| Hard-cooked eggs | 1 week | Do not freeze. |
| Egg substitutes, liquid Unopened Opened | 10 days 3 days | 12 months Do not freeze. |

EGGS

| Product | Refrigerator at 32-40°F | Freezer at 0°F |
|---|--|--|
| Egg substitutes, frozen Unopened Opened | After thawing, 3 days or refer to "Use-By" date. | 12 months Do not freeze. |
| Casseroles with eggs | 3 to 4 days | After baking, 2 to 3 months. |
| Eggnog Commercial Homemade | 3 to 5 days 2 to 4 days | 6 months Do not freeze. |
| Pies Pumpkin or pecan Custard and chiffon | 3 to 4 days 3 to 4 days | After baking, 1 to 2 months. Do not freeze. |
| Quiche with filling | 3 to 4 days | After baking, 1 to 2 months. |

Egg information from <http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/eggstorage.html>

What do packaging dates mean?

- "Sell by" means the store should sell the product by the printed date, but the consumer still can eat the product safely after that date.
- "Best if used by" does not mean the consumer should use the product by the date listed for safety reasons, but for best quality and flavor.
- "Use by" is the last date recommended for use at peak quality. You likely will see a marked deterioration in product quality (flavor, appearance, texture) after that date. – Note: Do not use infant formula and baby food after the "use by" date.
- "Closed or coded dates" are packing numbers used by the manufacturer. Food can be recalled, using these packaging numbers, if a problem occurs.

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