

Eight Food Storage Tips to Make Your Groceries Last Longer

- 1 Make sure to promptly refrigerate food items that require a cold temperature.**

One simple way to keep food fresher is to ensure that you refrigerate items that need to be kept cold as soon as possible. When food is stored at a proper temperature, it slows the growth of bacteria — helping to keep your food fresher for longer and reducing the risk of food poisoning.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends putting meat, seafood, eggs, milk, produce, and other perishable foods in the refrigerator or freezer within two hours of purchase, or within one hour if the temperature outside is above 90 degrees.

- 2 Avoid washing your produce before storing it.**

Nearly half of all produce in America is thrown away. One simple way you can increase the time your fruits and veggies stay fresh is to wait to wash your produce until you are ready to eat it, as too much moisture will spoil them faster.

- 3 Store meat, poultry, and fish in the coldest spot in your fridge.**

Animal products, such as meat and fish, often spoil the fastest. In fact, it's often recommended to only keep fresh fish for up to days in the fridge before cooking it.

To help keep your meat products from spoiling before you get a chance to use them, keep these items toward the back of your fridge. This is the coldest part of your refrigerator. It's also a good idea to store these foods on the lowest shelf of your refrigerator to lower the risk of cross-contamination.

- 4 Avoid storing milk in the refrigerator door.**

To prolong your milk's shelf life, make sure to avoid keeping it in the refrigerator door where the temperature is warmest and tends to fluctuate the most. Instead, store milk in the back and bottom portions of your fridge, where temperatures are typically the coldest.

- 5 Reference food safety apps for quick advice.**

There are several apps out there that offer food safety recommendations and tips on the best ways to store your food items. To get quick, trusted answers to your food safety questions, download the [USDA FoodKeeper](#) app.

- 6 Inspect berries before storing them.**

Prolong the freshness of your strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and any other berries you eat by inspecting them for any spoiled or crushed fruit before refrigerating. Then, store the fruit unwashed in containers or plastic bags, and wash gently right before eating.

- 7 Store potatoes in a cool, dry place away from light.**

Have you ever bought a bag of potatoes only for them to start looking funky soon after? Chances are good that you're keeping your potatoes in a high light area, which causes them to turn green faster. Prevent this by storing your spuds in a cool, dark place. When stored properly, potatoes should last four to six months.

- 8 Transfer winter squashes to a cool, dry place after "curing" them.**

If you've had spaghetti squash sitting on your kitchen counter for a few weeks, don't be so quick to toss it! Many winter squash actually store well after the curing phase — which means simply storing the squash at room temperature (around 70 degrees) for 10–20 days. After this period, move the squash to a cool, dry place, such as your basement or garage, for long-term storage. Many winter veggies will keep fresh for months like this.

DID YOU KNOW

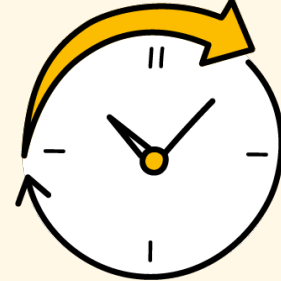
that Americans throw out more than 1,250 calories a day per person?

One of the reasons that so much food gets wasted by consumers is confusion over date labeling.

Most food products can be kept past their dates if they are handled properly, so resist the urge to toss out expired food without checking to see if it's still perfectly good.

Here's a list of 10 food products that are fine to eat past the expiration date as long as they've been properly stored:

1. Canned goods
2. Hard cheeses
3. Eggs
4. Yogurt
5. Bread
6. Dry pasta
7. Cookies
8. Crackers
9. Chocolate
10. Peanut butter



Keep food safe! Food safety basics

Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential in preventing foodborne illness. You can't see, smell, or taste harmful bacteria that may cause illness. In every step of food preparation, follow the four guidelines to keep food safe:

Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often.

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate.

Cook: Cook to proper temperatures, checking with a food thermometer.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly.

Shopping

- Purchase refrigerated or frozen items after selecting your nonperishables.
- Never choose meat or poultry in packaging that is torn or leaking.
- Do not buy food past "Sell-By," "Use-By," or other expiration dates.

Storage

- Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours (1 hour when the temperature is above 90° F).
- Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer with an appliance thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40° F or below and the freezer at 0° F or below.
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days.
- Perishable food such as meat and poultry should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and to prevent meat juices from getting onto other food.
- To maintain quality when freezing meat and poultry in its original package, wrap the package again with foil or plastic wrap that is recommended for the freezer.
- In general, high-acid canned food such as tomatoes, grapefruit, and pineapple can be stored unopened on the shelf for 12 to 18 months. Low-acid canned food such as meat, poultry, fish, and most vegetables will keep 2 to 5 years if the unopened can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, and dry place. Discard cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted. See our cold storage chart below.

Thawing

- **Refrigerator:** The refrigerator allows slow, safe thawing. Make sure thawing meat and poultry juices do not drip onto other food.
- **Cold Water:** Place food in a leak-proof plastic bag for faster thawing. Submerge in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook immediately after thawing.
- **Microwave:** Cook meat and poultry immediately after microwave thawing.

Preparation

- Always wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other food. After cutting raw meats, wash cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
- Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator.
- Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water.

Cooking

Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to a minimum internal temperature of 145° F as measured with a food thermometer before removing meat from the heat source. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat at higher temperatures.

Ground meats: Cook all raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal to an internal temperature of 160° F as measured with a food thermometer.

Poultry: Cook all poultry to an internal temperature of 165° F as measured with a food thermometer.

See our detailed cooking temperature chart below.

Serving

- Hot food should be held at 140° F or warmer.
- Cold food should be held at 40° F or colder.
- When serving food at a buffet, keep hot food hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Keep cold food cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving trays and replace them often.
- Use a food thermometer to check hot and cold holding temperatures.
- Perishable food should not be left out for more than 2 hours at room temperature (1 hour when the temperature is above 90° F).

Leftovers

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour if the temperature was above 90° F).
- Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.
- Use most cooked leftovers within 3 to 4 days. (See chart.)
- Reheat leftovers to 165° F.

Refreezing

Meat and poultry that has been defrosted in the fridge can be frozen again before or after it has been cooked. If thawed by other methods, cook before refreezing.

COOKING TEMPERATURES		
Product	Type	Minimum Internal Temperature & Rest Time
Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb	Ground	160° F
	Steak, chops, and roasts	145° F and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
Chicken & Turkey	Breasts	165° F
	Ground, stuffing, and casseroles	165° F
	Whole bird, legs, thighs, and wings	165° F
Eggs	Any type	160° F
Fish & Shellfish	Any type	145° F
Leftovers	Any type	165° F
Ham	Fresh or smoked (uncooked)	145° F and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
	Fully cooked ham (to reheat)	Reheat cooked hams packaged in USDA-inspected plants to 140° F and all others to 165° F.

COLD STORAGE CHART			
Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40° F)	Freeze (0° F) *
Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb			
Fresh Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb	Ground, hamburger, stew meat, variety meat (tongue, liver, heart, kidney, chitterlings)	1–2 days	3–4 months
	Chops, roasts, steaks	3–5 days	4–12 months
	Chops, pre-stuffed	1 day	Does not freeze well
Leftovers	Including casseroles	3–4 days	2–3 months
Corned Beef	In pouch, with pickling juices	5–7 days	Drained, 1 month
Bacon	Bacon	7 days	1 month

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COLD STORAGE CHART *(continued)*

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40° F)	Freeze (0° F) *
Ham (Pre-Cooked)			
Fully Cooked	Slices	3–4 days	1–2 months
	Half	3–5 days	1–2 months
	Whole	7 days	1–2 months
Canned Labeled “Keep Refrigerated”	Opened	3–5 days	1–2 months
	Unopened	6–9 months	Do not freeze
Vacuum Sealed	Unopened, fully cooked vacuum sealed, dated	“Use-by” date	1–2 months
	Unopened, fully cooked vacuum sealed, undated	2 weeks	1–2 months
Chicken, Turkey & Other Poultry			
Fresh	Chicken breast, pre-stuffed	1 day	Does not freeze well
	Ground, patties, giblets	1–2 days	3–4 months
	Pieces	1–2 days	9 months
	Whole	1–2 days	1 year
Leftovers	Casseroles	3–4 days	4–6 months
	Chicken nuggets, patties	1–2 days	1–3 months
	Pieces, plain or fried	3–4 days	4 months
	Pieces in broth or gravy	3–4 days	6 months
Eggs			
Fresh	In shell	3–5 weeks	Do not freeze
	Yolk, whites	2–4 days	1 year
Leftovers	Casserole, quiche, omelet	3–4 days	2 months
	Hard-cooked	1 week	Does not freeze well
Opened	Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	3 days	Does not freeze well
Unopened	Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	10 days	1 year

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COLD STORAGE CHART *(continued)*

Preparation	Type or Description	Refrigerate (40° F)	Freeze (0° F) *
Sausages & Lunch Meats			
Hard Sausage	Jerky sticks, pepperoni	2–3 weeks	1–2 months
Raw Sausage	Beef, chicken, pork, turkey	1–2 days	1–2 months
Smoked Sausage	Breakfast links, patties	7 days	1–2 months
Lunch Meat	Deli-sliced or store-prepared	3–5 days	1–2 months
Opened	Hot dogs	1 week	1–2 months
	Lunch meat: vacuum-packed, sliced	3–5 days	1–2 months
	Summer sausage labeled “keep refrigerated”	3 weeks	1–2 months
Unopened	Hot dogs	2 weeks	1–2 months
	Lunch meat: vacuum-packed, sliced	2 weeks	1–2 months
	Summer sausage labeled "keep refrigerated"	3 months	1–2 months
Seafood			
Fresh	Fish	1–2 days	3–8 months
	Shellfish	1–2 days	3–12 months
Leftovers	Fish and shellfish	3–4 days	3 months
Miscellaneous			
Frozen Dinners & Entrees	“Keep frozen”	Unsafe to thaw	3–4 months
Mayonnaise	Commercial, “refrigerate after opening”	2 months	Do not freeze
Other Leftovers	Gravy and meat broth	3–4 days	2–3 months
	Pizza	3–4 days	1–2 months
	Soups and stews	3–4 days	2–3 months
	Stuffing	3–4 days	1 month
Salads	Egg, chicken, ham, macaroni, tuna (store-prepared, homemade)	3–5 days	Does not freeze well