

Recommended food storage times

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Americans spend, on average, around 6% of their budgets on food. Knowing how to safely store foods will help you protect your investment with high quality results. Properly storing food gives you better nutrient retention, reduces waste, decreases risk of foodborne illness, and ensures fresher, better tasting food. Food held beyond the recommended storage time may still be safe, but the quality may have started to deteriorate. Ultimately, the shelf life of any food will depend on the food itself, its packaging, and the storage temperature and humidity. The tables included in this publication are recommended storage times for best quality while maintaining the basics of food safety.

Quality of pre-frozen food

For best storage results, start with high quality foods. Besides food safety, quality is based on our senses: appearance, aroma, temperature, texture, and flavor. Choose fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season to help insure you get the best tasting and highest quality produce. Wash produce thoroughly with clean, cool, running water before freezing. Other fresh foods, such as eggs, dairy, meat, poultry, and seafood may have expiration dates. Check the label before purchasing.

Reading labels

Manufacturers provide “use by” dates, “sell by” dates and “best by” dates. This allows consumers to see when the product is considered at its best quality. The “use by” date is the date



the manufacturer has determined the product is at its peak quality. While the food may be safe to eat, the color, texture, flavor, and nutritional value may begin to deteriorate after this date. Similarly, the “best by” date is when the food is at its peak condition. The “sell by” date indicates the last recommended day of sale. Retail stores usually pull products after the sell by date. Reading labels can help you buy the freshest, best quality foods. If you plan to freeze a food, you should label the food with its name and recommended “use by” date.

Temperature

Keeping foods at the proper temperature before or during freezing is a food safety basic. Proper storage temperatures either slow or stop bacteria from growing, maximizing the length of time that food can be stored. Refrigerator temperatures should be kept at 41 degrees F or below. Freezer temperatures should be kept at 0 degrees F or below. Some foods may not freeze well, resulting in poor appearance, texture, color, or moisture. Any food you plan to freeze should be frozen quickly. As foods freeze, the water in them expands and turns into ice crystals. Ice crystals may cause damage to the food and negatively affect the texture, flavor, and nutritional value. The longer food takes to freeze, the larger ice crystals tend to become.

Freezer containers

Using appropriate freezer packaging can also help maintain the quality of frozen foods. The containers should indicate that they are freezer friendly. Usually look for plastic or glass containers that are BPA free, easily stackable, and have a durable, airtight lid or closure that you can easily label. Reusable packaging or those that you can microwave or place directly into the oven upon thawing may be an attractive attribute.

Power outages

Without power a full upright chest freezer or refrigerator freezer will keep food frozen about two days, if you do not open the lid. If the freezer is only half-full, it will keep for one day. If the power is off for an extended period, transport food to freezers where there is electricity or use block or dry ice. Handle dry ice according to instructions. Do not touch or breathe fumes.

Without power, a refrigerator will keep food cool for four to six hours, depending on the kitchen temperature. Use block or dry ice to keep food cold for long periods.

When the electricity returns, if ice crystals are present in food or the food feels refrigerator-cold, it can be refrozen, but there may be a loss of quality in color, texture, flavor, and nutrient content. If the food is completely thawed but is cold, it must be cooked within 24 hours. Any thawed food that has risen above room temperature and remained there for two hours or more should be discarded. Foods with strange colors or odors should be discarded.

**Never taste foods.
If in doubt, throw it out!**



Dairy Products

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Butter or margarine	1-3 months	6-9 months
Buttermilk	1-2 weeks	Freezes poorly
Cheese spread, opened	2 weeks	Freezes poorly
Condensed milk, opened	3-5 days	1 month
Cottage or farmer's cheese	1 week	Freezes poorly
Cream, half and half	3-4 days	4 months
Cream cheese	2 weeks	Freezes poorly
Evaporated milk, opened	3-5 days	Freezes poorly
Fluid milk	5-7 days after sell-by date	1-3 months
Hard cheese	6 months(unopened), 3-4 weeks (opened)	6 months
Ice cream and sherbet	Do not refrigerate	2 months
Nonfat Dry Milk (NFDM)	5-6 months	10-12 months
Processed cheese	3-4 weeks	4 months
Pudding	2 days after opening	Freezes poorly
Reconstituted NFDM	3-5 days	Freezes poorly
Sour cream	7-21 days	Freezes poorly
Whipped cream	2-3 hours	1 month
Whipping cream	10 days	2 months
Yogurt	1 week after sell-by date	1-2 months



Eggs

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Fresh in shell	3-5 weeks	Blend egg white and yolk, then freeze
Raw whites	2-4 days	1 year
Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	1 week (unopened) 3 days (opened)	Do not freeze
Hard cooked	1 week	Do not freeze
Eggnog, commercial	3-5 days	6 months
Eggnog, homemade	2-4 days	Do not freeze



Meat Products

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Roasts and steaks	3-5 days	4-12 months
Chops	3-5 days	4-6 months
Ground and stew meats	1-2 days	3-4 months
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Canned ham	6-9 months (unopened) 5-14 days (opened)	Do not freeze
Corned beef, in pouch	5-7 days	1 month, drained
Ham, slices (fully cooked)	3-4 days	1-2 months
Ham, half (fully cooked)	3-5 days	1-2 months
Ham, whole (fully cooked)	1 week	1-2 months
Hotdogs	2 weeks (unopened) 1 week (opened)	1-2 months 1-2 months
Sausage, raw	1-2 days	1-2 months
Smoked breakfast links, patties	1 week	1-2 months
Organ meats	1-2 days	1-2 months
Lunch meats	2 weeks (unopened) 3-5 days (opened)	1-2 months 1-2 months
Prosciutto, Parma or Serrano ham, dry Italian or Spanish type, sliced	2-3 months	1 month
Vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal	2 weeks (unopened)	Do not freeze
Cooked meats, casseroles, soups, stews	3-4 days	2-3 months
Gravy and meat broth	1-2 days	2-3 months
Egg, macaroni, ham, chicken and tuna salads	3-4 days	Do not freeze



Poultry Products

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Chicken or turkey, whole	1-2 days	1 year
Chicken or turkey, pieces	1-2 days	9 months
Ground poultry and giblets	1-2 days	3-4 months
Duck, goose, game birds	1-2 days	9 months
Fried or boiled chicken	3-4 days	4 months
Cooked poultry casseroles	3-4 days	4-6 months
Cooked poultry with broth or gravy	3-4 days	6 months
Nuggets or patties	3-4 days	1-3 months
Stuffing, cooked	3-4 days	1 month



Fish and Shellfish

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Lean Fish — cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, pollack, ocean perch, rock fish, sea trout, sole	1-2 days	6 months
Fatty fish — bluefish, mackerel, mullet, salmon, smelt, swordfish, tuna	1-2 days	2-3 months
Cooked fish	3-4 days	4-6 months
Smoked fish, vacuum packaged	14 days or date on package	2 months
Surimi	2 weeks	9 months
Breaded fish	Do not refrigerate	3 months
Shrimp	1-2 days	3-6 months
Scallops	1-2 days	3-6 months
Crayfish	1-2 days	3-6 months
Squid	1-2 days	3-6 months
Clams	1-2 days (shucked)	3-6 months
	2-3 days (live)	2-3 months
Mussels	1-2 days (shucked)	3-6 months
	2-3 days (live)	2-3 months
Oysters	1-2 days (shucked)	3-6 months
	2-3 days (live)	2-3 months
Lobster	1-2 days (live)	2-3 months
Crab	1-2 days (in shell)	2-3 months
Cooked shellfish	3-4 days	3 months



Fruits

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Apples	1 month	8-12 months
Apricots	3-5 days	8-12 months
Avocados	5 days	8-12 months
Bananas	5 days at room temperature	Freeze poorly
Berries	2-3 days	8-12 months
Cherries	2-3 days	8-12 months
Cranberries	1 week	8-12 months
Grapes	5 days	10-12 months
Guavas	1-2 days	8-12 months
Kiwis	6-8 days	4-6 months
Lemons, limes, oranges, grapefruit	2 weeks	4-6 months
Mangos	Ripen at room temperature	8-12 months
Melons	1 week	8-12 months
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
Canned fruits	2-4 days (opened)	2-3 months
Frozen juice concentrate	Do not refrigerate	2 years
Frozen juice reconstituted	6 days	6-12 months



Vegetables

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Artichokes	2-3 days	Freeze poorly
Asparagus	2-3 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
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
Cucumbers	1 week	8-12 months
Eggplant	2-3 days	8-12 months
Green beans	1-2 weeks	8-12 months
Greens	3-5 days	8-12 months
Jicama	2-3 weeks	8-12 months
Kohlrabi	1 week	8-12 months
Lettuce and salad greens	3-5 days	Freeze poorly
Lima beans	3-5 days	8-12 months
Mushrooms	1-2 days	8-12 months
Okra	3-5 days	8-12 months
Onions, green	3-5 days	Freeze poorly
Parsley	2-3 days	3-4 months
Peas	3-5 days	8-12 months
Peppers	1 week	8-12 months
Radishes	2 weeks	Freeze poorly
Squash, winter	Store in a dry place	8-12 months
Squash, summer	3-5 days	8-12 months
Tomatillos	1 week	8-12 months
Tomatoes	1 week	8-12 months
Yuca	1-2 days	8-12 months
Zucchini	3-5 days	8-12 months
Frozen vegetables	Do not refrigerate	8 months
Canned vegetables	1-4 days (opened)	2-3 months



Baby Food

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Expressed breast milk	3-4 days	3 months
Formula mixed with water	Discard	Discard; do not freeze
Strained fruits and vegetables	2-3 days	6-8 months
Strained meat and eggs	1 day	1-2 months
Strained meat and vegetable combination	1-2 days	1-2 months
Homemade baby foods	1-2 days	1-2 months



Baked Products

Refrigerated storage of breads promotes staleness. Store breads at room temperature for 3 to 7 days unless otherwise indicated.

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Bread, yeast	Room temperature	4-6 months
Biscuits	Room temperature	2-3 months
Muffins	Room temperature	2-3 months
Quick breads	Room temperature	2-3 months
Pancakes and waffles	Room temperature	1-2 months
Rolls, yeast	Room temperature	2-3 months
Refrigerated biscuits	Use-by date	Do not freeze



Cakes and Cookies

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Angel	1-3 days at room temperature	2 months
Chiffon and sponge	1-3 days at room temperature	2 months
Cheesecake	3-7 days	2-3 months
Fruitcake	6-8 months	1 year
Pound	3-5 days at room temperature	6 months
Iced layer cake	1-3 days at room temperature	6 months
Baked cookies	5-7 days at room temperature	4-6 months
Unbaked cookie dough	Use-by date	2 months



Pastries and Pies

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Danish and doughnuts	1-3 days at room temperature	3 months
Chiffon pie	2-3 days	1 month
Fruit pie	2-3 days	1 year
Mincemeat pie	2-3 days	4-8 months
Pumpkin pie	2-3 days	1 month
Unbaked fruit pie	Do not refrigerate	8 months
Quiche	3-5 days	After baking, 2-3 months



Canned Goods

Food Product	Shelf Life
High acid canned foods and juices including tomatoes, grapefruit, apple products, mixed fruit, berries, pickles, sauerkraut, and vinegar-based products	1 year
Low acid canned foods including meat and poultry products, vegetable soups (not tomato), all vegetables	2-5 years
Home-canned products — all types	1 year



Miscellaneous

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Fresh Pasta	1 week	1 month
Mayonnaise	2 months	Freeze poorly
Nuts	6 months	1 year
Sandwiches	1-2 days	1 week
Tofu	1 week	1 month
Coffee and tea	4-6 weeks	1 year
Peanut butter	6-8 months	6-8 months
Catsup, chili, cocktail sauce	6 months (opened)	Freeze poorly
Mustard	6-8 months	8-12 months
Coconut, shredded, opened	8 months	1 year
Honey, jams, jellies, syrup	6-8 months (opened)	Freeze poorly
Bottled salad dressing	3 months	Freeze poorly
Vegetable shortening	6-9 months	Freeze poorly



Dry Good Shelf Storage

Staples	Shelf Life
Baking powder and soda	18 months
Barley	2 years
Bread crumbs	6 months
Bulgar	5-6 months
Cereal, ready-to-eat	2-3 months (opened) 6-12 months (unopened)
Cereal, ready-to-cook	6 months
Chocolate, baking	6-12 months
Cornstarch	18 months
Flour, bleached	6-8 months
Flour, whole wheat	6-8 months
Honey and syrup	1 year
Noodles, egg	6 months
Noodles, plain	1-2 years
Olive oil	6 months
Pasta	2 years
Rice	2 years
Rice, brown or wild	6 months
Sugar, brown	4 months
Sugar, granulated	2 years +
Sugar, powdered	18 months
Pasta	2 years
Wheat germ	8-12 months (unopened)
Yeast, dry	Expiration date

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