Colorado State University

Extension

Food Storage for Safety and Quality

Fact Sheet No. 9.310

Food and Nutrition Series | Health

by P. Kendall and N. Dimond*

Proper food storage helps to preserve the quality and nutritional value of the foods you purchase, and also helps make the most of your food dollar by preventing spoilage. Additionally, proper food storage can help prevent foodborne illnesses caused by harmful bacteria.

Use fresh, perishable foods soon after they are harvested or purchased. Signs of spoilage that make food unpalatable but not a bacterial hazard are the rancid odor and flavor of fats caused by oxidation, slime on the surface of meat, and the fermentation of fruit juices due to yeast growth. Off-odors in foods and a sour taste in bland foods can indicate dangerous bacterial spoilage. However, food can be high in bacteria count even without such signals.

Food Selection

Buy food from reputable producers or retailers, with a known record for safe handling. Select dated products only if the "sell by" or "use by" date has not expired. While these dates are helpful, they are reliable only if the food has been kept at the proper temperature during storage and handling. Although many products bear "sell by" or "use by" dates, except for infant formula, product dating is not a federal requirement.

Select products labeled "keep refrigerated" only if they are stored in a refrigerated case and are cold to the touch. Frozen products should be solidly frozen. Packages of precooked foods should not be torn or damaged.

Avoid cross-contamination between potentially hazardous foods and fresh foods like fruits and vegetables. Place raw meat and poultry in individual plastic bags to prevent meat from contaminating foods that will be eaten without further cooking. Put packages of raw meat and poultry in your shopping cart where juices cannot drip on other foods.

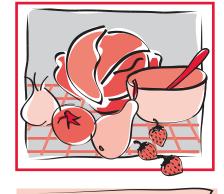
Shop for perishables last. Keep refrigerated and frozen items together so they will remain cold. Place perishables in the coolest part of your car during the trip home. If the time from store to home refrigerator is more than one hour, pack them in an insulated container with ice or an ice pack.

Food Storage

To retain quality and nutritive value, stock only the kinds and amounts of food you can store properly. Proper storage means maintaining a clean refrigerator and freezer. Avoid overcrowding the refrigerator. Arrange items so cold air can circulate freely. To reduce dehydration and quality loss, use freezer wrap, freezer-quality plastic bags, or aluminum foil over commercial wrap on meat and poultry that will be stored in the freezer for more than two months.

Table 1 gives short but safe time limits that will help keep refrigerated food from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. The time limits for frozen foods are to maintain flavor and texture. It is still safe to eat frozen foods that have been stored longer.

See Table 1, pages 2-5.



Quick Facts

- Place perishables in the coolest part of your car during the trip home. If the time from store to home refrigerator will be more than one hour, plan ahead and pack an insulated container with ice or an ice pack.
- Place raw meat and poultry in individual plastic bags to prevent meat from contaminating foods that will be eaten without further cooking.
- Use a thermometer to check that the refrigerator is between 35 and 40 degrees F and the freezer at 0 F degrees or below. These temperatures are important in that they prevent the growth of bacteria and keep your food from spoiling.

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Table 1. Safe food storage guidelines.

Product (35-40 degrees F) Comments		Refrigerator	Freezer	
Breads: baked breads (no preservatives)2-3 weeks baked muffins baked quick breads partially baked cinnamon rolls unbaked rolls and bread (average)	Product			
baked muffins baked quick breads partially baked cinnamon rolls unbaked rolls and bread unbaked rolls and bread unfosted, baked * 1 month unfosted, baked * 2-4 months Cookies: baked dough 3-4 days 3 months Flour: white or whole wheat Flour: white or whole Flour: white Floure		BREA	DS, PASTRIES	AND CAKES
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	Refrigerator	Freezer	
Product (35-40 degrees F)	(0 degrees F)	Comments
	EGO	GS AND EGG PR	RODUCTS
Eggs: fresh yolks or whites	4 days	12 months	To freeze, break eggs out of shell; stir until yolk is well blended with white or other yolks. Add small amount of salt, sugar or corn syrup to improve keeping quality.
in shell, fresh	3-5 weeks	NR	
in shell, hard-cooked	1 week	NR	Decorated Easter eggs: If you intend to eat them, keep refrigerated. If eggs are at room temperature for more than 2 hours, do not eat them.
Eggs: liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, opened Egg-containing products:	4-5 days	1 year	
Canned puddings, opened Custards, custard sauces, puddir		NR	
custard-filled pastries and cake	s 1-2 days	NR	
Acceleration	4.0	FRUITS	
Apples	1-3 weeks	8-12 months*	
Apricots, cranberries	1 week	8-12 months*	
Avocados Bananas 1	3-5 days -2 days, unpeeled	4-6 months*	Dool din in lamon juice, troy fronzer store in fronzer had
Berries, cherries	-2 days, unpeeled 1-2 days	8-12 months*	Peel, dip in lemon juice, tray freeze; store in freezer bag.
•		1-2 months	Toyture will be setter after freezing. Defrigerate in glass
Canned fruits, opened Citrus fruits	3-5 days 3 weeks	4-6 months*	Texture will be softer after freezing. Refrigerate in glass or plastic to avoid metallic taste. Wrap cut surfaces to prevent loss of Vitamin C.
Dried fruit: cooked		4-6 months	wrap cut surfaces to prevent loss of vitamin C.
uncooked	3-5 days 6 months	12 months	
Grapes, peaches, pears,	o monuis	12 1110111113	
plums and rhubarb	3-5 days	8-12 months*	
Juices: canned, bottled, frozen	o o dayo	0 12 1110111110	Transfer canned juice to glass or plastic container after
concentrate	1 week	12 months	opening.
Melons	1 week	4-6 months*	Wrap cut surfaces to prevent Vitamin C loss, control
			odors.
*Freeze all fruits in moisture- and va	aporproof contain	ers. Follow recomn	mended procedures in fact sheet 9.331, Freezing Fruits.
		MEATS	
Fresh			Meats may be left in the supermarket packaging for
Bratwurst: fresh	1-2 days	2-3 months	refrigerator storage or for very brief freezer storage.
precooked	5-7 days	2-3 months	For frozen storage beyond two weeks, rewrap in
Chops: lamb	2-4 days	6-9 months	moisture- and vaporproof wrap or freezer bags.
pork, veal	2-4 days	4-6 months	
Ground beef, stew meat,			
ground pork, turkey, veal, lamb		3-4 months	
Roasts: beef lamb	2-4 days	6-12 months	
veal or pork	2-4 days 2-4 days	6-9 months 4-8 months	
	,		
		0 12 1110111110	
heart, kidneys)	1-2 days	3-4 months	
	2-3 davs	NR	
Cooked meat and meat dishes	3-4 days	2-3 months	Quickly refrigerate all cooked meats and leftovers. Use as soon as possible. Cut large roasts into halfs to cool in refrigerator. Fats tend to separate in homemade gravies,
Gravy and meat broth	1-2 days	2-3 months	Cool leftover gravy and broth quickly, in shallow
Processed and Cured Bacon	5-7 days	1 month	Keep packaged meats in original package. For best
Corned beef: drained and wrappe	•	1 month	quality, use within one week of "sell by" date.
	5-7 days	NR	
Frankfurters (hotdogs)	3-5 days*	1-2 months	Frozen, cured meats lose quality rapidly; use as soon as possible.
Sausage: pork, beef, turkey Steaks, beef Variety meats (tongue, liver, brain heart, kidneys) Cooked Canned meat, opened Cooked meat and meat dishes Gravy and meat broth Processed and Cured Bacon Corned beef: drained and wrappe in pouch with pickling juice Frankfurters	1-2 days 2-4 days s, 1-2 days 2-3 days 3-4 days 1-2 days 5-7 days ed 5-7 days 5-7 days	1-2 months 6-12 months 3-4 months NR 2-3 months 2-3 months 1 month NR	as soon as possible. Cut large roasts into halfs refrigerator. Fats tend to separate in homemade stews and sauces but usually recombine when locol leftover gravy and broth quickly, in shallow containers, in the refrigerator. Keep packaged meats in original package. For locality, use within one week of "sell by" date. Frozen, cured meats lose quality rapidly; use as

NR: Not recommended.

	Refrigerator	Freezer	
Product	(35-40 degrees F)	(0 degrees F)	Comments
		MEATS Conti	inued
Ham: canned, unopened	8-12 months	NR	
half	3-5 days	1-2 months	Small pieces of canned ham (opened) may be frozen for
whole	7 days	1-2 months	4-6 weeks.
Luncheon meats	4 days*	1-2 months	
Sausage: smoked	7 days	1-2 months	
dry and semidry sausage	2-3 weeks	1-2 months	

^{*}Storage time after vacuum-sealed package is opened. Unopened package may be kept two weeks or according to date on package.

	MISCELLA	NEOUS PERIS	SHABLE ITEMS
Baby food, prepared or opened	2-3 days	See comment	Store covered. Do not feed baby from jar. Reheat only enough for 1 feeding. Freeze homemade baby food in ice cube trays, covered. Use in 2-4 weeks.
Candies	6 months	6 months	Chocolates may discolor.
Casseroles	1-2 days	1 month	•
Ground spices	6 months*	6-12 months	Can be stored in cupboard.
Salads (store prepared or home egg, ham, chicken, tuna & ma		NR	·
Salad dressings, opened	6 months	NR	
Sandwiches	2-3 days	1 month	
Soups, stews	2-3 days	4-6 months	
Soy milk	1 week after opening	1-3 months	Unopened, aseptically packaged soy milk can be stored at room temperature for several months.
Tofu	1 week	5 months	Change storage water every day or two after opening.
*Refrigeration is not necessary	but will help keep flavo	r fresher.	
		POULTRY	

Fresh			
Chicken and turkey, whole	1-2 days	12 months	
Chicken, pieces	1-2 days	9 months	
Duck and goose, whole	1-2 days	6 months	
Giblets	1-2 days	3-4 months	
Turkey, pieces	1-2 days	6 months	
Cooked	-		
Canned poultry, opened	1-2 days	NR	
Cooked poultry dishes	3-4 days	4-6 months	
Fried chicken	3-4 days	4 months	
Pieces, covered with broth	1-2 days	6 months	
Pieces, not in broth	3-4 days	1 month	
Chicken nuggets, patties	1-2 days	1 month	
	-	VEGETABLE	ES
Asparagus	2-3 days	8-12 months*	
Beans, green or wax; celery	1 week	8-12 months*	
Beets, cabbage, carrots, turnips	1-2 weeks	8-12 months*	
Broccoli, Brussels sprouts	1 week	8-12 months*	
Cauliflower	1 week	8-12 months*	
Corn, on the cob	1-2 days	8-12 months*	
Cucumbers	1 week	NR	
Lettuce, other salad greens	1 week	NR	Store in bag or lettuce keeper.
Mushrooms	1-2 days	8-12 months*	Do not wash before refrigerator storage.
Okra	3-5 days	8-12 months*	
Onions: green	3-5 days	NR	
mature	1-2 weeks	3-6 months*	
Peas, lima beans, unshelled	3-5 days	8-12 months*	Store unshelled in refrigerator until used.
Peppers	1 week	8-12 months*	-
Radishes	2 weeks	NR	
Tomatoes: canned, open	1-4 days		
fresh, ripe	5-6 days	8-12 months*	

^{*}Blanch fresh vegetables and freeze in moisture- and vaporproof materials. See 9.330, Freezing Vegetables.

NR: Not recommended.

	(0 degrees F) D GAME AND S 6-12 months	Comments EAFOOD
-2 days	6-12 months	EAFOOD
•		
•		
-4 days		
	6-12 months	
-2 days	6 months	
,		
-4 days	NR	
-2 days	3-4 months	Store in coldest part of refrigerator. Do not use if liquid is frothy.
-4 days	4-6 months	•
-2 days	2 months	
-		
-2 days	2-3 months	
-2 days	4-6 months	
-2 days	6-9 months	
-2 days	6-12 months	
-2 days	2 months	
-2 days	6-12 months	
s or date on	2 months in	
ım package v	acuum package	
	-2 days -4 days -2 days -4 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -3 days -4 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -2 days -3 days -4 days -2	-2 days 6 months -4 days NR -2 days 3-4 months -4 days 4-6 months -2 days 2-3 months -2 days 4-6 months -2 days 4-6 months -2 days 6-9 months -2 days 6-12 months -2 days 2 months -2 days 6-12 months -2 days 6-12 months -2 days 6-12 months

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