

A Refrigerator Thermometer Can Make a Big Difference

When it comes to protecting yourself and your family from foodborne illness, one of your most effective tools is the kitchen refrigerator. At room temperature, the number of bacteria that cause foodborne sickness can double every 20 minutes! Chilling foods to the proper temperatures is one of the best ways to slow the growth of these bacteria.

To ensure that your refrigerator is doing its job, it's important to keep its temperature at 41°F or below; the freezer should be at 0°F. Since few refrigerator controls show actual temperatures, using an inexpensive freestanding appliance thermometer will allow you to monitor the temperature and adjust the setting of the temperature and/or freezer if necessary. Buy one for the fridge and freezer, and check them often.

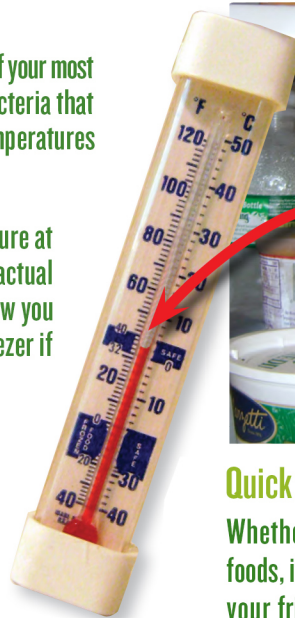
Refrigerator Strategies: Keeping Food Safe

- Avoid "overpacking." Cold air must circulate around refrigerated foods to keep them properly chilled.
- Store foods in covered containers or sealed bags.
- Clean the fridge frequently; wipe up spills immediately and clean your entire fridge at least once a year, wiping down shelves, walls and storage bins.
- Don't keep leftovers for more than 2-3 days and check for spoilage. If you're not sure, remember the rule: "When in doubt, throw it out!"
- Thaw frozen foods safely in the refrigerator, or fully submerged under cold, running water that's 70°F or below. If you thaw using the microwave, immediately cook the food after the thawing is done. Never thaw foods at room temperature.

In Case of a Disaster...

If your home loses power during a natural disaster, how do you know what foods you can safely keep and eat?

- If you have adequate warning that you could lose power, freeze containers of water in your freezer before the power is lost.
- If you lose power, keep the doors to your fridge/freezer closed as much as possible. Your fridge will keep food safely cold for about four hours if unopened; a full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours and a half-full freezer for about 24 hours.
- If you're unsure how long the temperature has been at above 41°F, don't take a chance. Throw the food out.
- Frozen food that still has ice crystals or is at 41°F or below can be safely refrozen or cooked (to be sure, check the appliance thermometer or use a food thermometer to check each individual food package).



Quick Chill

Whether you're dealing with leftovers or just-purchased foods, it's important to get foods that need refrigeration into your fridge quickly. Leaving perishable foods out for two hours or more allows bacteria to multiply rapidly — and can put you at serious risk of contracting foodborne illness.

- **Groceries:** When you get home from the grocery store, put your refrigerated items away as quickly as possible. Never allow raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or produce that requires refrigeration to sit at room temperature for more than two hours, or one hour if the air temperature is above 90°F. (If you're not sure whether certain produce requires refrigeration, ask your grocer.) Also, keep in mind that your car can get hotter than typical room temperature, so it's important not to leave groceries in your car longer than absolutely necessary.
- **Leftovers:** These need to be refrigerated or frozen within two hours. To help hot food cool faster, divide leftovers into smaller containers before putting them in the refrigerator.
- **Doggie Bags and Take-out Foods:** Again, the "two-hour rule" applies to carry-home foods. Leftovers from takeout or restaurant meals need to go into the refrigerator within two hours at most. If you can't get home within two hours after eating out, don't request a doggie bag.
- **Marinated Foods:** Stop! Before the meat touches the marinade, reserve a portion to baste with during cooking. Always keep food in the refrigerator while it's marinating, because bacteria can multiply rapidly in foods left to marinate at room temperature.

Get more food safety tips at www.fda.gov or www.usda.gov

