

Recommended Food Storage Times Cold and Dry Refrigerated and Frozen Foods

Americans lose money every day because of improper storage of food. The recommended storage time of food depends on what kind of food it is and the length of time and temperature the food is stored, before and after you purchase it. Properly storing food results in improved nutritional quality, reduced waste from spoilage, decreased risk in foodborne illness when eaten, and fresher, better tasting food. Food that is held past the recommended storage time may still be safe, but the quality may have begun to deteriorate. The tables below give the recommended storage times for maintaining good quality. Always start with high quality food. Refrigerator temperature should be kept below 40°F and freezer temperature below 0°F. Some food may not freeze well, resulting in changes in appearance, texture, color, or moisture, but they may still be safely frozen. Remember to rotate your foods using the FIRST IN, FIRST OUT rule.



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

Some foods may have open dates on the package to assist the consumer in proper storage. The most commonly used open dates are the sell-by date, use-by date, expiration date, or pack date. The sell-by date is the last recommended day of sale, but it allows for home storage and use. Breads and baked goods commonly have sell-by dates. Use-by dates recommend how long the food will retain top quality after you buy it. Packaged foods often have use-by dates. An expiration date indicates the last day the food should be eaten, commonly found on egg cartons. Canned or packaged foods may have pack dates that indicate the date of processing or the food may have a coded date that only the manufacturer understands. These dates offer no safety or quality information.



Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Fresh in shell	3-5 weeks	Freeze poorly
Raw yolks, whites	2-4 days	1 year
Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	10 days (unopened) 3 days (opened)	1 year (unopened) Freeze poorly
Hard cooked	1 week	Freeze poorly



Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Roasts and steaks	3-5 days	6-12 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) 3-5 months (opened)	Freezes poorly 1-2 months
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	1-2 days	1-2 months
Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1-2 months
Organ meats	1-2 days	3-4 months
Lunch meats	2 weeks (unopened) 3-5 days (opened)	1-2 months 1-2 months
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


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	1-2 days	6 months
Nuggets or patties	1-2 days	1-3 months


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) 2-3 days (live)	3-6 months 2-3 months
Mussels	1-2 days (shucked) 2-3 days (live)	3-6 months 2-3 months
Oysters	1-2 days (shucked) 2-3 days (live)	3-6 months 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

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 will be 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. Any thawed food that has risen above room temperature and remained there for two hours or more should be discarded. Foods with a strange color or odors should be discarded.
- **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

Vegetables





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

 **Baby Food** 

Food Product	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Expressed breast milk	3-5 days	3 months
Formula mixed with water	2 days	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

 **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

 **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



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

References

- Arizona Department of Health Services (2005), *Safe Food Storage Times and Temperatures*.
- National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (2002), *Be Cool-Chill Out! Refrigerate Promptly*.
- United States Department of Agriculture (2001), *Cold Storage Chart*.

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