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# Freezer Storage

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**S**toring foods in the freezer is a great way to maintain their quality, freshness, and nutritional value. The recommended freezer temperature (0 degrees Fahrenheit) will keep food safe to eat indefinitely. Depending on the food, the color, flavor, and texture will eventually deteriorate. Be careful. Harmful bacteria are not killed by freezing temperatures and could begin to grow once the food is thawed.

## The Colder, the Better

Freezers should be kept at a temperature of 0 degrees Fahrenheit or lower. There are a few extra things you can do in addition to turning down the dial to ensure a cold freezer. Keeping cool is all about air flow, so reduce the number of items in the freezer and add shelf space. This will allow the air to circulate in the freezer more efficiently for a more thorough freeze. Keep foods away from the back vent. Blocking this vent means blocking the air circulation and a warmer freezer.

## Packaging

Remember these three rules when wrapping for freezer storage: wrap tightly, wrap again, and wrap individual portions separately. Wrapping tightly and double wrapping help to maintain quality and prevent freezer burn. Wrapping individual portions separately lets you remove some of the food to prepare without thawing food that is not needed for your meal.

Use only moisture- and vapor-proof materials for storing solid foods. Good choices are polyethylene bags, freezer film wraps, and aluminum foil over a layer of plastic film next to the food. Acid foods may react to the aluminum if in direct contact. For liquid

foods, use plastic containers or canning jars specifically designed for freezer storage. Optimal storage materials are also easy to mark. Label your foods with the date and contents so that keeping an inventory is easy. Use a permanent marker to label. Write either on a strip of masking tape or directly on the plastic wrap. Permanent marker will come off empty plastic containers with rubbing alcohol. For a list of the brands with the best freezer performance, consult resources like *Cook's Illustrated* or *Consumer Reports*.

## Package Dating

Here are some package dating tips to help protect yourself and your family.

- Don't buy foods with out-of-date Sell-By or Best-if-Used-By dates. Report the problem to the store manager.
- Buy the food with the longest Best-if-Used-By date for best food quality. If you can't use perishable foods within 3 to 7 days, freeze.
- For quality purposes, be sure to freeze food before the Best-if-Used-By date to maintain the highest quality while frozen.
- Once properly frozen, the date becomes irrelevant as far as either food quality or safety is concerned. When you thaw, open, and prepare the food, use within 3 to 7 days to keep it safe.
- Discard improperly thawed and opened, or prepared foods that have been uneaten within 4 days.

## Thawing and Refreezing Foods

Most partially thawed foods will refreeze safely if they still contain ice crystals and are firm in the

center. However, many foods (such as partially thawed ice cream) will not be top quality. Do not refreeze completely thawed meat or poultry, pies or casseroles, or vegetables as harmful bacteria may have begun to grow. Other food completely thawed and warmed to room temperature should be immediately and thoroughly cooked, or discarded. Fruit juice concentrates are exceptions. They ferment when spoiled or when left at room temperature too long. Toss them if the flavor is “off.” Consult the Ohio State University Extension fact sheet “Attention Freezer Owners: In Case of Power Outage, DO NOT OPEN!” (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/home/freezer.html>) for information on what to do when your freezer’s power goes out and what to do with its food contents.

### More Tips on Freezing Foods

- Foods that contain whole grains should be stored in the freezer because of their oil content. The oil will become rancid over time if not frozen.
- Store yeast in a cool environment like the refrigerator or the freezer. The date on a package of yeast is an expiration date. Since it is a living organism, the expiration date is very important to be sure the yeast is still viable and able to cause fermentation.
- To store leftover baked goods, wrap the leftovers tightly in aluminum foil and then place in a zipper-lock bag and store in the freezer. To thaw, take the food out of the bag and place on the center rack of a 450 degree Fahrenheit oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Carefully remove the foil and place back in the oven until the crust reaches the desired crispness (probably a few minutes).
- Bagels and hamburger patties defrost more quickly when frozen pre-sliced or separately. Wrap each bagel in plastic wrap slipping a layer of plastic between the pre-sliced halves as well as around them. Then, place the contents in a freezer bag. Freezing this way allows frozen bagels to go straight from the freezer to the toaster. This technique also works for English muffins. To easily freeze and defrost hamburger patties, separate burgers with square pieces of parchment paper then place in a freezer bag. This technique also works with tortillas and crêpes. French toast and pancakes can be stored layered between parchment squares but will keep better if wrapped in plastic wrap than foil.
- If you usually buy fresh ground beef, shape it and then freeze it in individual patties.
- If keeping meat in the freezer, it may be left in its original packaging for up to two weeks. Beyond that time period, the meat needs to be wrapped tightly in moisture- and vapor-proof material designed for use in the freezer to prevent unwanted freezer burn.
- Defrost frozen fish, poultry, or meat in the refrigerator. Never defrost these foods on the counter or in the sink where the room temperature is more likely to allow the growth of bacteria. Thawing time will vary depending on the weight of the meat: approximately 4 to 7 hours per pound for a large roast; 3 to 5 hours per pound for a small roast; and 12 to 14 hours for a 1 inch steak. Frozen foods may also be cooked without thawing. Allow about  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  more cooking time.
- Fresh fish may be stored in the freezer in moisture- and vapor-proof wrap to keep air away from the product. Frozen fish products should be placed in the freezer immediately after purchasing unless you are planning to thaw and cook the fish. While fish may be thawed in the refrigerator, it should be cooked immediately after defrosting. Frozen packages take 18 to 24 hours for 1 pound of fish. Avoid refreezing fish as it results in poorer quality and a higher bacteria count.
- If you finish a bag of coffee beans in less than 10 to 12 days, store the coffee in either its original bag or in a zipper-lock bag away from heat and light. If you plan to keep beans longer than this, store them in the freezer. If you buy ground beans, store them in the freezer. If possible, measure the appropriate amount into a filter and cool to room temperature before brewing.

For more information about freezing foods, see these Ohio State University Extension fact sheets (<http://ohioline.osu.edu>):

- Freezing Combination Main Dishes, HYG-5308-09
- Freezing Fruits, HYG-5349-09
- Freezing Vegetables, HYG-5333-09
- Freezing Meat, Poultry and Game, HYG-5334-09
- Freezing Basics, HYG-5341-09

## Freezer Storage Chart

Here is a chart with information on the appropriate length of storage in the freezer for various foods.

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 0°F for Top Quality	Helpful Handling Hints
<b>Meat, Fish, Poultry</b>		
Bacon	Freezing not recommended.	Saltiness encourages rancidity.
Corned beef	If freezing, use within a month.	
Frankfurters	1 to 2 months—recommended with reservations	Emulsion may be broken and product will “weep.”
Ground beef, lamb, or veal	2 to 4 months	
Ground pork	1 to 2 months	
Ham and picnic cured	1 to 2 months—recommended with reservations	Saltiness encourages rancidity.
Luncheon meats	Freezing not recommended. If freezing, use within a month.	Emulsion may be broken and product will “weep.”
Beef roast	4 to 12 months	Check for holes in trays and plastic wrap of fresh meat. If none, freeze in this wrap up to two weeks. For longer storage, overwrap with suitable freezer wrap. Put two layers of waxed paper between individual hamburger patties.
Lamb or veal roast	6 to 9 months	
Pork roast	3 to 6 months	
Sausage, dry, smoked	Freezing alters flavor. If frozen, use within a month.	
Sausage, fresh, unsalted	1 to 2 months	
Beef steaks	6 to 9 months	Check for holes in trays and plastic wrap of fresh meat. If none, freeze in this wrap up to two weeks. For longer storage, overwrap with suitable freezer wrap. Put two layers of waxed paper between individual hamburger patties.
Beef chops	4 to 6 months	
Lamb or veal steaks and chops	3 to 4 months	
Pork steaks and chops	2 to 3 months	
Venison or game birds	8 to 12 months	
<b>Fish</b>		
Lean fish, cod, flounder, haddock, and sole fillets and steaks	6 months	Check for holes in trays and plastic wrap of fresh fish. If none, freeze in this wrap up to two weeks. For longer storage, overwrap with suitable freezer wrap.
Bluefish, perch, mackerel, and salmon	2 to 3 months	
Breaded fish	3 months	
Clams	2 to 3 months	
Cooked fish or seafood	3 to 6 months	
King crab	5 months	
Lobster tails	2 to 3 months	
Oysters	2 to 4 months	
Scallops	3 to 6 months	
Shrimp, uncooked	10 months	

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 0°F for Top Quality	Helpful Handling Hints
<b>Poultry</b>		
Chicken, whole or cut up	9 to 12 months	Check for holes in trays and plastic wrap of fresh poultry. If none, freeze in this wrap up to two weeks. For longer storage, overwrap with suitable freezer wrap.
Chicken livers	3 to 4 months	
Cooked poultry	3 to 5 months	
Duck, turkey	6 to 9 months	
<b>Fruit</b>		
Berries, cherries, peaches, pears, pineapples, etc.	12 months	
Citrus fruit and juice frozen at home	6 months	
Fruit juice concentrates	8 to 12 months	
<b>Vegetables</b>		
Home frozen	10 months	Cabbage, celery, salad greens, and tomatoes for slicing do not freeze successfully; tomatoes for soups, stews or sauces can be frozen successfully.
Purchased frozen	8 months	
<b>Baked goods</b>		
Yeast bread and rolls, baked	2 to 4 months	Freezing does not refresh baked goods. It can only maintain whatever the quality of the food was before freezing.
Rolls, partially baked	2 to 3 months	
Bread, unbaked	1 month	
Quick bread, baked	2 to 3 months	
Cake, baked, unfrosted	2 to 3 months	
Angel food cake	2 to 6 months	
Chiffon sponge cake	2 months	Freezing does not refresh baked goods. It can only maintain whatever the quality of the food was before freezing.
Cheesecake	2 to 3 months	
Chocolate cake	4 months	
Fruit cake	6 to 12 months	
Yellow or pound cake	6 months	
Cake, baked, frosted	3 to 4 months	
Cookies, baked	8 to 12 months	
Pie, baked	1 to 2 months	
Fruit pie, baked	6 to 8 months	
Cake, unbaked	1 month	
<b>Main Dishes</b>		
Meat, fish, and poultry; pies and casseroles	3 to 4 months	
TV dinners including shrimp, ham, pork, or frankfurter	3 to 4 months	
TV dinners including beef, turkey, chicken, or fish	6 months	

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 0°F for Top Quality	Helpful Handling Hints
<b>Home Frozen Foods</b>		
Baked muffins	6 to 12 months	
Unfrosted doughnuts	2 to 4 months	
Waffles	1 month	
Bread	3 months	
Cake	3 months	
Casseroles—meat, fish, poultry	2 to 4 months	
Cookies, baked and dough	2 to 3 months	
Nuts, salted	6 to 8 months	
Nuts, unsalted	9 to 12 months	
Pies, unbaked fruit	8 months	
<b>Dairy Products</b>		
Butter	6 to 9 months	
Margarine	12 months	
Whipped butter and margarine	<b>Do not freeze</b>	Emulsion will break and product will separate.
Buttermilk, sour cream, and yogurt	<b>Do not freeze</b>	
Camembert cheese	3 months	
Cottage, farmer's cheese (dry curd only)	1 to 3 months	Do not freeze creamed cottage cheese; it gets mushy.
Neufchatel cheese	<b>Do not freeze</b>	
Cheddar cheese	6 weeks	
Edam, gouda, Swiss, brick cheeses, etc.	6 to 8 weeks	
Processed cheese, food products (loaves, slices)	4 to 6 months	
Roquefort, blue cheese	3 months	
Cream—light, heavy, half-and-half	2 to 4 months	
Whipped cream	1 to 2 months	
Eggs in shell	<b>Do not freeze</b>	Yolks will thicken and will be unsatisfactory in cooked products.
Whole eggs out of shell or egg yolks	12 months	Beat thoroughly with either 1/2 tsp salt or 2 Tbs of sugar per cup of yolk or whole egg to control thickening of the yolk; use in food products that ordinarily use salt or sugar as an ingredient.
Egg whites	12 months	Added salt or sugar not necessary.
Ice cream, ice milk, sherbet, frozen yogurt	2 months	
Milk	1 month	

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