

Guidelines for Refrigeration of Foods

We can prevent food waste and foodborne illness by making the right decisions about refrigerated food storage.

WHAT FOODS NEED TO BE REFRIGERATED?

*Refrigerate these foods to keep them **SAFE** to eat...*

* **Cooked low acid, high protein, moist foods**

Foods such as those listed below are a perfect haven for bacteria that cause food poisoning. Refrigeration prevents growth of most of them.

- Cooked meat, poultry, seafood and foods made from them (soups, casseroles, pot pies, lunch meat, hot dogs)
- Cooked eggs and egg products (custard, quiche, cream pie)
- Potato and pasta salads, pizza, gravy, stuffing, cooked vegetables

* **Vacuum packaged meat, seafood, vegetables**

Clostridium botulinum bacteria can grow in these foods. Refrigeration slows growth and toxin production.

* **Smoked seafood**

A strain of Clostridium botulinum unique to seafood grows slowly at refrigerator temperatures. These products should not be refrigerated longer than 2-3 weeks.

* **Homemade raw or cooked garlic and/or herbs in oil**

The mixture must be refrigerated and used within 4 days. Freeze for long-term storage.

*Refrigerate these foods to maintain high **QUALITY** as well as **SAFETY**...*

* **Raw eggs; raw meat, poultry, seafood**

Cold temperatures maintain quality of raw animal products. Bacteria such as Salmonella and Listeria grow in the intestinal tracts of animals, so it is important to cook refrigerated animal foods thoroughly before eating.

* **Nuts, dried fruit**

Mold can grow on these products. Refrigeration slows the growth of toxic mold.

* **Dairy products** (e.g., milk, yogurt, hard cheese)

The quality of dairy products deteriorates rapidly when they are left at room temperature.

The dates on cartons are quality indicators. Dairy products will be tasty and safe to eat beyond the date if they have been handled properly.

Refrigerate these foods to maintain **QUALITY**...

Although these foods can be safely stored at room temperature, they'll stay top quality longer in the refrigerator...

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Condiments (mustard, ketchup, relish, pickles, mayonnaise)
- Fats, oils, salad dressing, shortening
- Syrup, jam, jelly
- Peanut butter
- Whole grains
- Ground coffee

DO NOT refrigerate these foods (*Refrigeration affects quality*)

* **Honey** Sugar crystals will form.

* **Raw potatoes, mature onions, winter squash** - Refrigeration causes undesirable changes in quality (such as flavor). Store at 60°F.

* **Bread** - bread stales more quickly at refrigerator temperatures. Freeze it instead.

HOW LONG CAN FOODS BE KEPT IN THE REFRIGERATOR?

With the exception of smoked fish and garlic/herbs in oil mixtures, length of refrigeration is not a good index for judging safety of refrigerated foods. Charts that show recommended storage times for refrigerated food are actually just a guide to eating quality. If properly handled, refrigerated foods will still be safe to eat until they show changes in quality: off-odor, mold growth, sliminess.

Mishandled perishable foods can make you sick even though they look and smell normal!

The safety of moist, high protein foods depends on how they were handled **before** refrigeration:

- Prepare them with clean hands, utensils, and work surfaces (especially after handling raw meat, seafood, poultry, eggs.)
- Cook meat, poultry, seafood, eggs thoroughly.
- Do not leave perishable foods at room temperature longer than 2-3 hours.

Source: OSU Master Food Preserver Program