

CHILL FACTS



Bacteria grow most rapidly in the Danger Zone—the unsafe temperatures between 40 °F and 140 °F—so it's key to keep foods out of this temperature range. And since cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying . . . be sure to refrigerate foods quickly!

The Top 4 Cool Rules

1. The Chill Factor—Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared foods, and leftovers within 2 hours of purchase or preparation, or within 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F. Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
2. The Thaw Law—Never defrost food at room temperature. Thaw food in the refrigerator. For quick thawing, submerge food in cold water in airtight packaging, or thaw food in the microwave if you'll be cooking it immediately.
3. Divide and Conquer—Separate large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quicker cooling in the refrigerator.

4. Avoid the Pack Attack—Don't over-stuff the refrigerator. Cold air must circulate to keep food safe.

'Fridge Quiz!

Put your knowledge of proper refrigeration to the test.

1. Should hot food be placed directly in the refrigerator? YES or NO
2. Refrigeration prevents bacterial growth. TRUE or FALSE
3. At what temperature should you set your refrigerator?
_____ °F

ANSWERS:

1. Yes, but divide large quantities of food into shallow containers for quicker cooling.
2. False. Refrigeration slows, but does not prevent the growth of harmful bacteria.
3. 40 °F to discourage the growth of foodborne bacteria. Use a refrigerator/ freezer thermometer to check the temperature of your refrigerator regularly.

Serve & Preserve

When serving cold food at a buffet, picnic, or barbecue, keep these "chilling" tips in mind.

- Cold foods should be kept at 40 °F or colder.
- Keep all perishable foods chilled right up until serving time.
- Place containers of cold food on ice for serving to make sure they stay cold.
- It's particularly important to keep custards, cream pies, and cakes with whipped-cream or cream-cheese frostings refrigerated. Don't serve them if refrigeration is not possible.

The Big Thaw

Foods must remain at a safe temperature while thawing. Now is the perfect time to learn about the DOs and DON'Ts of defrosting.

Defrosting Dos

- Defrost food in the refrigerator. This is the safest method for all foods.
- Short on time? Thaw meat and poultry in airtight packaging submerged in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes, so the food continues to thaw.
- Defrost food in the microwave only if it will be cooked immediately.
- Food can be cooked without defrosting it first. Make sure food reaches its safe internal temperature.

Defrosting DON'Ts

- Avoid keeping foods in the Danger Zone—the unsafe temperatures between 40 °F and 140 °F.

- Don't defrost food in hot water.
- Don't thaw food on the counter. Food that's left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F, is not within a safe temperature range and may not be safe to eat.

Hit the Road!

When traveling with food, be aware that time, temperature, and a cold source are key. Here are some tips to help keep your travels cool!

- Keep frozen foods in the refrigerator or freezer until you're ready to go.
- Always use ice or cold packs and fill your cooler with food. A full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled.
- When traveling, keep the cooler in the air-conditioned passenger compartment of your car, rather than in a hot trunk.
- If you've asked for a doggie bag to take home from a restaurant, it should be refrigerated within 2 hours of serving.

If you have questions or concerns about food safety, contact:

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Meat and

Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 or (202) 720-3333 (Washington, DC area). The TTY number for the hearing impaired is (800) 256-7072.

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Food Information Line at (888) SAFE FOOD.
- The Fight BAC![™] Web site at: www.fightbac.org