



## Emergency Preparedness Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency

---

Did you know that a flood, fire, national disaster, or a loss of power from high winds, snow, or ice could jeopardize the safety of your food? Knowing how to determine if food is safe and how to keep food safe will help minimize the potential loss of food and reduce the risk of foodborne illness. This fact sheet will help you make the right decisions for keeping your family safe during an emergency.

### ABCD's of Keeping Food Safe in an Emergency

Always keep meat, poultry, fish and eggs refrigerated at or below 40°F and frozen food at or below 0°F. This may be difficult when the power is out.

Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full), if the door remains closed.

Be prepared for an emergency by having items on hand that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on the outdoor grill. Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply. Make sure you have ready-to-use baby formula for infants and pet food. Remember to use these items and replace them from time to time. Be sure to keep a hand-held can opener for an emergency.

Never taste food to determine its safety! You will have to evaluate each item separately. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when the power comes back on. If the appliance thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine the safety. Remember you can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below, it is safe to refreeze. Refrigerated food should be safe as long as power is out not more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) that have been above 40°F for 2 hours.

Consider what you can do ahead of time to store your food safely in an emergency. If you live in a location that could be affected by a flood, plan your food storage on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water. Coolers are a great help for keeping food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours - have a couple on hand along with frozen gel packs. When your freezer is not full, keep items close together - this helps the food stay cold longer.

Digital, dial, or instant-read food thermometers and appliance thermometers will help you know if the food is at safe temperatures. Keep appliance thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer at all times. When the power is out, an appliance thermometer will always indicate the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer no matter how long the power has been out. The refrigerator temperature should be 40°F or below; the freezer 0°F or lower. If you're not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with a food thermometer.

## Refrigerator Foods

### When to Save and When to Throw It Out

FOOD	Held over 40°F for over 2 hrs.	FOOD	Held over 40°F for over 2 hrs
<b>Meat, Poultry, Seafood</b> Raw or leftover cooked meat, poultry, fish or seafood, soy meat substitutes	Discard	<b>Cheese</b> Soft cheeses: blue/bleu, cream, Brie, Jack, Roquefort, Camembert, cottage, Edam, Monterey, Ricotta, mozzarella, Muenster, Neufchatel, Queso blanco fresco	Discard
Thawing meat or poultry	Discard	Hard Cheeses: Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Parmesan, provolone, Romano	Safe
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, egg salad	Discard	Processed Cheeses	Safe
Gravy, stuffing, broth	Discard	Shredded Cheeses	Discard
Lunchmeat, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef	Discard	Low-fat Cheeses	Discard
Pizza- with any topping	Discard	Grated Parmesan, Romano or combo (can or jar)	Safe
Canned hams labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Discard	<b>Dairy</b> Milk, cream, sour cream, soy milk, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt, eggnog	Discard
Canned meats & fish, opened	Discard	Butter, margarine	Safe
<b>Eggs</b> Fresh eggs, hard-cooked in shell, egg dishes, egg products	Discard	Baby formula, opened	Discard
Custards and puddings	Discard	<b>Casseroles, Soups, Stews</b>	Discard
<b>Fruits</b> Fresh fruits, cut	Discard	<b>Sauces, Spreads, Jams</b> Opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Discard if above 50°F over 8 hrs
Fruit juices, opened	Safe	Peanut butter	Safe
Canned fruits, opened	Safe	Jelly, relish, taco sauce, mustard, catsup, olives, pickles	Safe
Fresh fruits, coconut, raisins, dried fruits, candied fruits, dates	Safe	Worcestershire, soy, barbecue, hoisin sauces	Safe
<b>Bread, Cakes, Cookies, Pasta, Grains</b> Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads, tortillas	Safe	Fish sauces, (oyster sauce)	Discard
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough	Discard	Opened vinegar-based dressings	Safe
Cooked pasta, rice, potatoes	Discard	Opened creamy-based dressings	Discard
Pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinaigrette	Discard	Spaghetti sauce, opened jar	Discard
Fresh pasta	Discard	<b>Vegetables</b> Fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices	Safe
Cheesecake	Discard	Greens, pre-cut, pre-washed, packaged	Discard
Breakfast goods-waffles, pancakes, bagels	Safe	Vegetables, raw	Safe
<b>Pies, Pastries</b> Pastries, cream filled	Discard	Cooked vegetables, tofu	Discard
Pies-custard, cheese filled, or chiffon; quiche	Discard	Vegetable juice, opened	Discard
Pies, fruit	Safe	Baked potatoes	Discard
		Commercial garlic in oil	Discard
		Potato salad	Discard

## FROZEN FOODS

*When to save it and when to throw it out*

Food	Still contains ice crystals and feels as cold as if refrigerated	Thawed. Held above 40°F for over 2 hours	Food	Still contains ice crystals and feels as cold as if refrigerated	Thawed. Held above 40°F for over 2 hours
<b>Meat, Poultry, Seafood</b> Beef, veal, lamb, pork and ground meats	Refreeze	Discard	<b>Dairy</b> Milk	Refreeze. May lose some texture.	Discard
Poultry and ground poultry	Refreeze	Discard	Eggs (out of shell) and egg products	Refreeze	Discard
Variety meats, (liver, kidney, heart, chitterlings)	Refreeze	Discard	Ice Cream, frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard
Casseroles, stews, soups	Refreeze	Discard	Cheese (soft and semi-soft)	Refreeze. May lose some texture.	Discard
Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	Refreeze. However, there will be some texture and flavor loss.	Discard	Hard cheeses	Refreeze	Refreeze
<b>Fruits</b> Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.	Shredded cheeses	Refreeze	Discard
Home or commercially packaged	Refreeze. Will change texture and flavor	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell, or sliminess develops.	Casseroles containing milk, cream, eggs, soft cheeses	Refreeze	Discard
<b>Vegetables</b> Juices	Refreeze	Discard if held above 40°F for 6 hours.	Cheesecake	Refreeze	Discard
Home or commercially packaged or blanched	Refreeze. May suffer texture and flavor loss	Discard after held above 40°F for 6 hours.	<b>Breads, Pastries</b> Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (without custard fillings)	Refreeze	Refreeze
<b>Other</b> Casseroles-pasta, rice based	Refreeze	Discard	Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling	Refreeze	Discard
Flour, cornmeal, nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze	Pie crusts, commercial and homemade bread dough	Refreeze. Some quality loss may occur.	Refreeze. Quality loss is considerable.
Breakfast items-waffles, pancakes, bagels	Refreeze	Refreeze			
Frozen meal, entrée, specialty items (pizza, sausage and biscuit meat pie, convenience foods)	Refreeze	Discard			

Adapted from: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, April 2004

Distributed by: Cape Cod Cooperative Extension, PO Box 367, Barnstable MA 02630, Tel: (508) 375-6690

*UMass Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer, United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Contact your local Extension office for information on disability accommodations or the UMass Extension Director if you have complaints related to discrimination.*