

How Long Can I Keep Food in My Refrigerator?

Be Food Safe – Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill! Cold temperatures slow the growth of harmful bacteria. Keeping the refrigerator at a constant 40°F or below is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk of foodborne illness. Use a refrigerator thermometer to be sure the refrigerator is below 40°F and the freezer is 0°F or below. Below is an abridged USDA Cold Storage Chart with recommended times of storage in the refrigerator and freezer. These time limit guidelines will help keep refrigerated food safe to eat. Because freezing keeps food safe indefinitely, recommended storage times for frozen foods are for quality only.

Product	STORAGE PERIOD	
	In Refrigerator	In Freezer
Fresh Meat:		
Beef: Ground	1-2 days	3-4 months
Steaks and roasts	3-5 days	6-12 months
Pork: chops	3-5 days	3-4 months
Ground	1-2 days	1-2 months
Roasts	3-5 days	4-8 months
Cured meats:		
Lunch meat	3-5 days	1-2 months
Sausage	1-2 days	1-2 months
Gravy	1-2 days	3 months
Fish:		
lean (such as cod)	1-2 days	up to 6 months
fatty (such as blue, perch, salmon)	1-2 days	2-3 months
Chicken: whole	1-2 days	12 months
parts	1-2 days	9 months
giblets	1-2 days	3-4 months
Dairy Products:		
Swiss, brick, processed cheese	3-4 weeks	*
Milk	5 days	1 month
Eggs: fresh in shell	3-5 weeks	-
hard-boiled	1 week	-
Leftovers:		
Cooked meat or poultry	3 to 4 days	2 to 6 months
Chicken nuggets, patties	1 to 2 days	1 to 3 months
Pizza	3 to 4 days	1 to 2 months

* Cheese can be frozen, but freezing will affect the texture and taste.

(Sources: Food Marketing Institute for fish and dairy products, USDA for all other foods.)

For more information about food safety in the home, call the Fairfax County Health Department's Food Safety Section at 703-246-2444, TTY 703-591-6435 or visit the Web site at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food>.