



Fact Sheet

SAFE FOOD STORAGE

Fresh? Frozen? Or shelf-stable? Food items in the supermarket are stored a certain way to maintain product quality and to keep foods safe. Once a food product has been chosen from the shelf or cooler, the consumer is responsible for making sure it is properly transported and stored at home. Failure to safely store food may cause bacteria in food to multiply and could result in a foodborne illness if the food is consumed.

At the supermarket

- Choose canned and dry goods first. Buy refrigerated/frozen and hot deli items last.
- Don't choose cans that bulge, leak or are dented at the seam or rim.
- Double bag (in plastic) meat and poultry to prevent cross-contamination from any dripping juices.
- Check eggs to make sure that they are not cracked or dirty.

On your way home

- Foods containing bacteria that can cause foodborne illness can't be in the "Danger Zone" (less than 60° C or 140° F or above 4° C or 40° F) longer than two hours. Bacteria multiply rapidly and can reach dangerous levels at this stage.
- Once you have purchased your food, go directly home. If this is not possible, place perishable foods in a cooler until you get home.

Storing shelf stable foods

- Store unopened dry foods, canned goods and high acid items (like ketchup, mustard and vinegar) in a clean, dry place where the temperature is neither too hot (above 100° F) or too cold. After opening, refrigerate any foods that need to be kept cool.
- Do not use food from cans or jars that are damaged.

Storing refrigerated food

Though food is refrigerated to prolong freshness and inhibit bacterial growth, there is a limit to how long food can be kept in the refrigerator. Once food begins to look or smell bad, it should be discarded.

Follow these tips to help keep refrigerated food safe:

- Maintain a temperature of 4° C or 40° F or less to inhibit bacterial growth.
- Store eggs in their carton on a shelf, not in the door.
- Keep meat and poultry products in the original packaging. Less handling reduces the incidence of cross-contamination.
- Keep your refrigerator clean to avoid cross-contamination from spilled or spoiled foods.
- Don't let meat or juices of raw meat and poultry contaminate other foods in the refrigerator.

Storing frozen foods

- Keeping food at -18°C (0° F) stops bacterial growth, but it will not kill bacteria already present.
- Food can safely be defrosted in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave. If you defrost food in the microwave, cook it immediately.
- Foods frozen near the beginning of their durable life will taste better than foods frozen near the end of their durable life.
- Food that is freezer burnt (dry in spots) is safe to eat (but may not taste very good).

Durable life information on food products

- Durable life is the amount of time that an unopened product will retain all of its wholesomeness, taste, nutritional value, and any other qualities claimed by the manufacturer, when stored under appropriate conditions.
- Manufacturers and retailers are responsible for determining the durable life of foods they manufacture and sell.
- Durable life information is not a guarantee of product safety.

For more information on foodborne illness and safe food handling practices, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at www.inspection.gc.ca

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