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# Fact Sheet

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## FOOD SAFETY FACTS ON LEFTOVERS

Foodborne illness can occur as a result of using improper food handling techniques when storing and reheating leftovers. Follow these food safety tips to decrease the risk of foodborne illness from handling leftovers:

### Storing leftovers

- After handling and preparing leftovers, wash your hands and sanitize all utensils and work surfaces with a mild bleach solution (5 ml/1 tsp. bleach per 750 ml/3 cups water). Ensure dishes are clean as well.
- Refrigerate leftovers immediately. Cold food should be stored at 4°C (40°F) or colder.
- Very hot items can be cooled at room temperature for approximately 30 minutes prior to being refrigerated. Frequent stirring accelerates the cooling at this stage.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in covered, shallow containers. Food will cool faster in shallow containers.
- Place containers on wire refrigerator shelves to allow air to flow across the bottom of the container. This practice allows food to cool twice as fast as sitting on a solid shelf.
- An effective way to cool and store hot leftovers is in zipper-type plastic bags. Although the bags must be closed securely for liquids, food cools quickly because a large, flat surface area is exposed to the refrigerated air.
- Never remove a large pot of food (such as soup, stew, or pasta sauce) from the stove and place it in the refrigerator. Large masses of food can take hours or days to chill properly. A slow cooling process provides an ideal environment for the growth of harmful bacteria.
- Store leftovers within 2 hours of cooking. Discard leftovers if the food has been sitting at room temperature for more than 1 hour.
- Debone large pieces of meat or poultry and divide them into smaller portions before storing.
- Do not overcrowd your refrigerator. Leave airspace around containers to allow circulation of cold air. This will help ensure rapid, even cooling.
- Date leftovers to ensure that they are not stored too long – eat leftovers within 2 to 3 days. For frozen leftovers, eat within 2 to 3 days of being taken out of the freezer.
- Always put leftovers in clean containers and never mix them with fresh food.

### **Reheating leftovers**

- Solid leftovers must be reheated to at least 74°C (165°F). Do not reheat foods slowly.
- Reheat soups, sauces and gravies to a rolling boil.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when reheating leftovers in a microwave.
- If leftovers are uneaten after they have been reheated, discard them.
- NEVER use your nose, eyes or taste buds to judge the safety of food. You cannot tell if a food may cause foodborne illness by its look, smell or taste. Instead, follow the "Food Safety Tips" listed here, and remember: "If in doubt, throw it out!"

For more information on foodborne illness and safe food handling practices, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca)