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STOCKING UP? FOLLOW THESE 14 TIPS FOR STORING FOOD SAFELY

Stay-at-home advisories mean many households are stocking up on food to limit their trips to the grocery store. That means taking extra care to store food safely, so you don't waste money and risk foodborne illnesses. Keep in mind that perishable foods must be stored in the refrigerator or freezer to prevent bacteria growth that can make you sick and that not all foods will stay fresh in air-tight containers. Non-perishable foods must also be stored in a way that maintains quality and safety. Use this guide to proper storage to keep everything in your kitchen crisp and fresh so you can enjoy your home cooked meals.

For the refrigerator:

- Make sure your refrigerator temperature is at or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Monitor the temperature by keeping an appliance thermometer in your fridge.
- Cooked and perishable foods, including leftovers, should be stored within two hours.
- Cooked food should be used within three to four days.
- Raw meats and poultry should be wrapped to prevent meat juices from contaminating other foods. These items should be stored below or away from food that will not be cooked
- Use fresh poultry, fish and ground meats within two days. Use beef, lamb or pork within three to five days.



For the freezer:

- Make sure your freezer temperature is at or below 0 degrees. Monitor the temperature by keeping an appliance thermometer in your freezer.
- Frozen foods should be placed in the freezer within two hours of purchase. Leftovers should be frozen within two to three days of cooking.
- It is safe to leave meat and poultry in its original packaging; however, wrapping it in an extra layer of freezer paper, foil or plastic wrap will help to maintain the quality. Fresh meat and poultry should be frozen if it will not be cooked with a few days (see refrigerator section above).
- Date frozen foods and use the foods that have been frozen the longest first.
- While your freezer is suitable for long-term storage, the length of time you can keep frozen foods varies. Refer to the [Cold Food Storage Chart](#) from the USDA.

For the pantry/cupboard:

- Shelf-stable food such as canned goods, rice, pasta, cereal, flour, sugar, and oils can be safely stored in a cool, dry place.
- When stocking your pantry, store newer food packages behind older packages and use the FIFO method (First In, First Out).
- Most commercially canned meats and vegetables can be stored in the pantry or cupboard for two to five years. Foods high in acid (for example, tomatoes and fruits) should be used within 12 to 18 months.
- Do not store shelf-stable foods in places that may experience extreme temperature variations or that may be damp, such as a basement, garage, near the stove or under the sink.

Check out these resources for more food safety and storage tips:

[Kitchen Companion: Your Safe Food Handbook](#)

[Refrigeration and Food Safety](#)

[Shelf-Stable Food Safety](#)

Source: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

For more information, contact Carinthia Cherry, Ph.D., nutrition specialist, at cacherry@ncat.edu.

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