

Freezer Storage Times: Tips for Storing Food Safely



How long can you freeze food for before it's no longer safe to eat? See this **frozen food storage chart** to find out whether or not you can freeze cheese, how long you can freeze chicken for, how long fruit lasts in the freezer, and much more. Plus, find tips for freezing foods correctly.

This is a great chart for people who use the freezer often to store food for a long time. You might be surprised to find that you can freeze most foods much longer than you imagined without a loss in quality.

This chart lists everything from raw meat to ready-to-eat desserts.

NOTE: These times assume that the freezer temperature is maintained at 0°F (-18°C) or colder. The storage times are for quality only. Frozen foods remain safe almost indefinitely.

How long can you freeze cheese for?

Product	Store in Freezer
All cheeses, except those listed below	6 months
Cottage cheese, cream cheese, feta, goat, fresh mozzarella, Neufchâtel, Parmesan, processed cheese (opened)	Not recommended

How long can you freeze dairy products for?

Product	Store in Freezer
Butter	6 to 9 months
Cream, half-and-half	4 months
Ice cream	1 to 2 months
Margarine (not diet)	12 months
Milk	3 months
Yogurt	1 to 2 months

How long can you freeze fish and seafood for?

Product	Store in Freezer
Clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, shrimp	3 to 6 months
Fatty fish (bluefish, mackerel, perch, salmon)	2 to 3 months
Lean fish (flounder, haddock, sole)	6 months

How long can you freeze fresh fruit for?

Product	Store in Freezer
All fruit (except those listed below)	10 to 12 months
Avocados, bananas	3 months
Citrus fruit	4 to 6 months
Fruit Juices	8 to 12 months

How long can you freeze fresh vegetables for?

Product	Store in Freezer
Artichokes, eggplant	6 to 8 months
Asparagus, rutabagas, turnips	8 to 10 months
Bamboo shoots, cabbage, celery, cucumbers, endive, radishes, salad greens, watercress	Not recommended
Beans, beets, bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, corn, greens, kohlrabi, leeks, mushrooms, okra, onions, parsnips, peas, peppers, soybeans, spinach, summer squash	10 to 12 months
Tomatoes (overripe or sliced)	2 months

How long can you freeze meat for?

Product	Store in Freezer
Cooked	2 to 3
Ham, hot dogs, and lunch meats	1 to 2 months
Sausage, bacon	1 to 2 months
Uncooked, ground	3 to 4 months
Uncooked roasts, steaks, or chops	4 to 12 months
Wild game, uncooked	8 to 12 months

How long can you freeze poultry for?

Product	Store in Freezer
Cooked	4 months
Giblets, uncooked	3 to 4 months
Uncooked	12 months
Uncooked parts	9 months

How long can you freeze other foods for?

Product	Store in Freezer
Cakes	4 to 6 months
Casseroles	2 to 3 months
Cookie dough	2 months
Cookies	3 months
Fruit pies, baked	2 to 4 months
Fruit pies, unbaked	8 months
Pastry, unbaked	2 months
Pumpkin or chiffon pies	1 months
Quick breads	2 months
Raw egg yolks, whites	12 months
Soups and stews	2 to 3 months
Yeast breads	6 months
Yeast dough	2 weeks

Note: When freezing liquids or foods with liquid, be sure to leave space in the container for expansion.

Food-Freezing Tips

- **To freeze or not to freeze?** Foods that shouldn't be frozen include eggs in shells and food in cans. (Once food is out of a can, it may be frozen.) Pressurized liquids also shouldn't be frozen, as they can expand and burst.
- **Freeze at 0°F (-18°C).** To retain vitamin content, color, flavor, and texture, freeze items at peak freshness and store at 0°F or lower. Food stored constantly at 0°F will always be safe to thaw and eat; only quality suffers with lengthy freezer storage. (However, freshness and quality at the time of freezing will affect the condition of frozen foods.) **Label foods for easy identification.** Write the dish name/contents, number of servings (1 quart=4 servings; 1 pint=2 servings), and date on containers or bags. **Freeze individually.** To prevent sticking, spread food to be frozen (berries, hamburgers, cookies, etc.) on a cookie sheet and freeze until solid. Then place in plastic bags and into the freezer.
- **Freeze for guests.** Most cookies freeze well and thaw quickly—a convenience when entertaining. Simply cover a plate of assorted cookies with plastic wrap or aluminum foil and put it in the freezer.
- **Freeze foods more quickly** by placing them directly against the side of the freezer. **Organize your freezer by food.** Arrange the contents of the freezer by food category to make things easier to find and to minimize the time the freezer door is open. **Leave the freezer be.** If power is interrupted or if the freezer is not operating normally, do not open the freezer door unless absolutely necessary. Food in a loaded freezer will usually stay frozen for up to 2 days.

Refreezing Foods

- Once food has thawed in the refrigerator, it is safe to refreeze it without cooking, although there may be a loss of quality due to the moisture lost through defrosting. After cooking raw foods
- which were previously frozen, it is safe to freeze the cooked foods. And if previously cooked foods are thawed in the refrigerator, you may refreeze the unused portion.
- If you purchase previously frozen meat, poultry, or fish at a retail store, you can refreeze if it has been handled properly and kept at 40°F or below at all times.

Effects of Freezing

If frozen for too long, the quality of some foods will suffer. Here are some examples:

- Canned ham ... will become watery and soft
- Cottage cheese, sour cream, cooked eggs, yogurt, mayonnaise ... texture will suffer
- Crumb toppings ... will become soggy
- Fried foods ... may become rancid
- Home-stuffed whole poultry on carcass ... may become contaminated due to freezing or thawing
- Lettuce, cabbage, radishes, green onions, celery ... will become mushy
- Milk, cream, custard, and meringue fillings ... will separate
- Sauces heavy in fat ... may separate or curdle Whipping cream
- ... may not re- whip

Adapted from Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA