

Safety of Frozen Foods After a Power Failure

If flood water enters your freezer or refrigerator, dispose of all food not sealed in metal airtight cans or glass jars.

If power is interrupted, or the refrigerator or freezer is not working properly for a short period of time, keep the door closed to keep cold air inside. This helps prevent food spoilage, or thawing. Freezers and refrigerators should be equipped with thermometers.

When anticipating a power failure (as prior to a flood warning), set the refrigerator and freezer temperature to the coldest setting to build up a cooling reserve.

Foods in the Freezer

Thawing rate

With the door closed, food in most freezers will stay below 40F up to 3 days, even in summer. Thawing rate depends on:

- The amount of food in the freezer. A full freezer stays cold longer than one partially full.
- The kind of food. A freezer filled with meat stays cold longer than a freezer filled with baked goods.
- The temperature of the food. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen.
- The freezer. A well insulated freezer keeps food frozen longer than one with little insulation.
- Size of freezer. The larger the freezer, the longer food stays frozen.
- Cool hot foods before refrigerating them to minimize rising temperature in the refrigerator.

Emergency Measures

- Keep the door closed.
- If possible, move food to a locker plant. To move food safely, wrap it in newspapers or blankets, or place it in insulated containers, such as camping coolers.
- If you can't take food to a locker plant, leave it in your freezer, and cover freezer with blankets, quilts, crumpled newspapers, or excelsior.
- Use dry ice if it is available. Wear gloves to handle dry ice and proceed as recommended (see fact sheet, Using Dry Ice During a Power Failure).

When Food has Thawed

You may safely refreeze some foods if they still contain ice crystals or if they have been kept at 40 degrees F or below for no more than 2 days. If the temperature is above 50 degrees F throw food away.

Canning

Foods that cannot be refrozen but are safe to use may be canned immediately.

Treat completely thawed foods as follows:

- Fruits. Refreeze fruits if they taste and smell good. Fruit that is beginning to ferment is safe to eat, but will have an off-flavor. Such fruit could be used in cooking.
- Do not refreeze frozen dinners that have thawed.
- Vegetables. Do not refreeze thawed vegetables. Bacteria in these foods multiply rapidly. Spoilage may begin before bad odors develop. Such spoilage may be very toxic. Refreeze vegetables only if ice crystals remain throughout the package. If you question the condition of any vegetables, throw them out.
- Meat and poultry. Examine each package of thawed meat or poultry. If meat has been above 40xF for more than 2 hours, discard.
- Fish and shellfish. These are extremely perishable. Do not refreeze unless ice crystals remain throughout the package. Seafood may be spoiled, even if it has no offensive odor.
- Ice cream. Do not refreeze melted icecream.

Cook thawed frozen foods and frozen dinners immediately if they are still cold. Do not refreeze. If any foods have an offensive or questionable odor, do not eat.

Disaster-Handbook-UPDATES * Safety-of-Frozen-Foods-After-Power-Failure.

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