



Mrs. Cookwell's Steamin' Hot

Food Safety Tips



CANADIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR
CONSUMER FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION
PARTENARIAT CANADIEN POUR
LA SALUBRITÉ DES ALIMENTS

www.CanFightBAC.org

Ask Mrs. Cookwell

Can I refreeze fish or meat once it is thawed?



“A good question and the answer is - it depends!” Thawing and refreezing anything will affect the quality of the food. Ice crystals damage cell structure and freezing may remove moisture from the food. In terms of safety, if the food has been in the refrigerator while thawing and is still partially frozen then it can be refrozen. However, if the food was thawed out of the fridge or in the microwave, then do not refreeze. Parts of the surface or interior of the food will have been exposed to temperatures above 4°C for a period of time. If the food has been thawed, the safest thing to do is cook the fish or meat before refreezing. Never thaw food on the counter. Foods thawed in a microwave need to be cooked immediately.

Should you cool leftovers before refrigerating?



“No, you do not need to cool hot food before you put it in the fridge, but very hot food (e.g. simmering chili) can be left out for 30 minutes before refrigerating”.

The key is to cool hot food quickly to prevent bacteria growth. Bacteria grow very well in the temperature range of 4°C - 60°C. Food should be cooled to 4°C or lower as quickly as possible.

Fast cooling tips include:

- **store food in shallow containers** (3 inches (8 cm) or less);
- **stir hot foods occasionally** to speed-up cooling;
- **do not stuff the fridge** - allow cool air to circulate around food.

Is it safe to eat food after the ‘best before’ date?



“It depends on how you look after the food”. ‘Best before’ dates and ‘packaged on’ dates are important labels to read when food shopping. The ‘best before’ date indicates how long the unopened product will retain its freshness and high quality – it’s more a quality indicator than a safety indicator. Once vacuum-packed packages are opened, the ‘best before’ date no longer applies. The product’s storage life is now the same as if it were a fresh product. The ‘packaged on’ date tells you the day the fresh food was packaged in the store. This date is usually the starting point for how long you can expect the food to stay safe to eat.

Download the Food Storage Guide at www.canfightbac.com for easy reference. If food is not handled safely either in the store or by the consumer (e.g. fresh meat or dairy products not kept refrigerated) it can become unsafe to eat before the ‘best before’ date.

Should you wash meat or poultry before preparing it? Does this promote food safety?



Washing raw poultry, beef, pork, lamb, or veal before cooking it is not recommended. Review of studies from several universities related to washing meat and poultry indicate that there is no benefit. In fact, washing can allow bacteria on meat and poultry to spread to other ready-to-eat foods. Bacteria that may be present on the surface of the meat or poultry will be destroyed by cooking to proper temperatures.

Can I eat pizza when it has been left out over night?



“You can, but don’t!” To prevent bacteria growth in food, food should be kept hot (60°C) or higher or cold (4°C) or lower – and never left at room temperature for more than two hours. Cheese and meat are good mediums for bacteria growth. Food like pizza should be handled using safe food handling practices. To keep leftover pizza safe, cover it and store it in the refrigerator.

What is salmonella?



Salmonella is a type of bacteria that can make people sick. The disease you get from Salmonella is called salmonellosis. Salmonella bacteria live in the environment, in animal feed and in the intestines of animals. This means that foods or places exposed to animal waste might contain Salmonella bacteria. You can come in contact with it through:

- raw and undercooked meat, especially poultry;
- unpasteurized (raw) milk and milk products like raw milk cheeses;
- raw and undercooked eggs and their products (e.g., homemade hollandaise sauce);
- sprouts (uncooked seed and bean sprouts);
- unwashed raw fruits and vegetables and their products (e.g., unpasteurized juice)

Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill are your best protection!

Eggs – is it true you should not store eggs on the refrigerator door?



“Yes, it’s true!” Store eggs in their original container – in the center or back of the fridge where the temperature will fluctuate less than on the door. The carton guards against breakage and odor absorption and helps to prevent moisture loss which lowers egg quality. Buy eggs with clean, uncracked shells and discard dirty, cracked or leaking eggs. Use fresh, Canada Grade A eggs. The ‘best before’ date on the carton will help determine freshness.

What is freezer burn and is it safe to eat products that have freezer burn?



“Freezer burn” is simply dry spots on frozen products. It can be prevented with proper packaging. Dry spots can be cut away and the food safely eaten. While it is safe to freeze foods in their supermarket wrappings, many supermarket wrappings are air permeable. To maintain food quality, over wrap packages with airtight heavy-duty foil, plastic wrap, freezer paper, or plastic freezer bags. Date packages and use the oldest items first.

Can I cut mold off cheese and still safely eat it?



While cheese-makers use cultured molds to make cheese – mold gives Brie and Camembert their delicious edible rinds – not all cheese mold is edible. Some molds cause spoilage by growing on the surface of cheese. They produce streaks of discoloration, clumps of blue, green or white fuzzy looking growths – these molds are bad and unsafe to eat!

- If mold forms on hard or firm cheese (e.g., cheddar, parmesan), generously trim off mold plus 2.5 cm (1 inch) of cheese surrounding it (be careful to keep your knife clean of mold); wrap the trimmed cheese in new wax/plastic wrap and refrigerate.
- Discard fresh cheese, soft cheese (e.g., feta, brie, camembert) and processed cheese that is moldy. It is difficult to judge how far the mold has penetrated – so do not keep it, or eat it.

To prevent mold growth on cheese, refrigerate cheese sealed in its original packaging, until ready to use. Once opened, wrap the cheese tightly in waxed paper or plastic wrap and keep refrigerated. If moisture has condensed on the cheese, wipe it off with a clean paper towel before rewrapping.