



Safe Handling of Take-Out Foods

Perishable foods can cause illness when mishandled. Proper handling of food leftovers is essential to ensure it is safe for you to eat.

2-Hour Rule

To keep hot foods safe, keep them at 140 °F or above. Cold foods must be kept at 40 °F or below. Bacteria grows rapidly between 40 and 140 °F. Discard all perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, and casseroles, left at room temperature longer than 2 hours; 1 hour in temperatures above 90 °F.

Keep HOT Food HOT! Keep COLD Food COLD!

If you are not eating food immediately, follow these guidelines to make sure the food remains safe for you to eat at a later time.

Hot Food

Once food is cooked it should be held hot at an internal temperature of 140 °F or above. Just keeping food warm (between 40 and 140 °F) is not safe. Use a food thermometer to monitor the internal temperature of the food. A preheated oven, chafing dishes, preheated warming trays, or slow cookers may be used.

If you plan to eat at a later time, take-out or delivered food should be divided into smaller portions or pieces, placed in shallow containers, and refrigerated.

Cold/Refrigerated Food

Cold foods should be kept at 40 °F or below.

Refrigerate perishable foods as soon as possible, always within 2 hours after purchase or delivery. If the food is in air temperatures above 90 °F, refrigerate within 1 hour.

Remember the 2-hour rule when food is removed from the cooler. Discard all perishable foods that have been left out of the coolers longer than 2 hours; 1 hour in air temperatures above 90 °F.

Leftovers?

Discard all perishable foods, such as meat, poultry, eggs, and casseroles, left at room temperature longer than 2 hours; 1 hour in air temperatures above 90 °F. This includes leftovers taken home from a restaurant.

Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in shallow containers. Wrap or cover food.

Refrigerator Storage at 40 °F or Below:

Cooked meat or poultry 3 to 4 days
Foods stored longer may begin to spoil or become unsafe to eat. Do not taste.

Freezer Storage at 0 °F or Below:

Cooked meat or poultry 2 to 6 months
Foods kept frozen longer than recommended storage times are safe but may be drier and not taste as good.

Reheating Meals

Reheat foods containing meat or poultry to an internal temperature of at least 165 °F. Always use a food thermometer to verify the internal temperature of the food. Reheat sauces, soups, and gravies to a boil.

If reheating in the oven, set oven temperature no lower than 325 °F.

Reheating in slow cookers and chafing dishes is NOT recommended because foods may remain in the "Danger Zone" (between 40 and 140 °F) too long.

When reheating food in microwave oven, cover and rotate food for even heating. Always allow standing time before checking the internal temperature of the food. Consult your microwave oven owner's manual for recommended times and power levels.

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

From the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.