



# Food Storage Quick Guide

Use this guide to determine how to best store your food. Depending on the food, different storage methods may be utilized: pantry, refrigerator and/or freezer. Some storage methods are for safety, others are for quality.

## Before preparing food for storage:

- Wash hands, utensils and preparation areas
- Clean storage units and areas
- Have thermometers to monitor storage unit temperature
- Set refrigerators at 41°F or colder and freezers at 0°F

## Fruits and Vegetables

- Uncut produce may be safely stored in the pantry. The quality of many fruits and vegetables will be extended from 1-4 weeks if stored in the refrigerator.
- Cut leafy greens, melon and tomatoes must be stored in the refrigerator for safety.
- Frozen produce may be safely stored in the freezer indefinitely, but quality can decline over time.
- For best quality, package food in containers or wraps designed for freezer use, removing as much oxygen as possible before sealing. Leave headspace in rigid containers to avoid the seal being broken by food that has expanded once frozen.

## Refrigerated Packaged Foods

- Due to *Listeria*, a bacteria that grows under refrigerated conditions and causes the foodborne illness listeriosis, observe the "use-by" dates on packaging or freeze for longer storage.

## Canned and Shelf-Stable Packaged Foods

- Unopened canned foods may be safely stored indefinitely, although quality issues can occur over time.
- Avoid cans with sharp-edged dents as the contents may have become contaminated.
- The "use by" date on infant formula is for safety. Degradation of nutrients over time may pose a risk to infant health as this may be their only source of nutrition. Dates on other food packaging are for quality not safety.

## Meat, Fish and Poultry

- Store in the refrigerator.
- For best quality use fresh meat within 3-5 days, poultry within 2-3 days and fish within 1-2 days. Cooked products should be used within 7 days for safety.
- To freeze, tightly wrap meat, fish and/or poultry in freezer wrap or foil, pressing out oxygen. These foods may be frozen indefinitely, but for best quality use within 6 months to a year.

## Dairy and Eggs

- The "use by" dates on dairy products are for best quality not safety.
- Eggs may be safely stored in the refrigerator for several weeks.
- For longer storage, shell and lightly mix the yolk and white of raw eggs and freeze using a container designed for freezer storage. For best quality, use within 1 year.
- Dairy products may be safely frozen but some types of dairy foods (ex: cream) will suffer quality issues, such as separation, but are still safe to consume. For best quality use frozen dairy within 1 year.

## Bread and Baked Foods

- May be stored on the counter, but refrigerating or freezing can extend shelf life by preventing them from going stale.
- Wrap tightly to prevent moisture loss.

## Product Dates

- Sell By - not safety data, it tells the store how long to display the product
- Best if Used By/Before - indicates when the food will be of best flavor or quality
- Use-By - last date of peak quality
- Closed or coded dates - packing numbers used by the manufacturer