

Nutrition On Your Own

Storing Leftovers Safely

Store leftovers properly to keep them safe. Put leftovers in clean, covered containers. Store a large amount of a leftover in several small shallow containers instead of one large container. For example, when you make a big pot of soup, pour the soup into several small, shallow containers, rather than one big one. Put the containers in the refrigerator immediately. Do not leave out on the counter top.

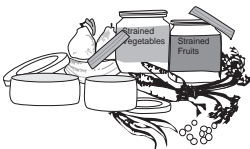
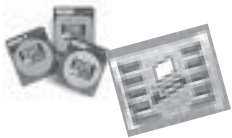
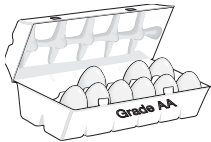


The chart on the next page shows the maximum amount of time that leftovers should be kept in the refrigerator or freezer. The length of time that leftovers can be kept safely depends on:

- ◆ whether the food was handled safely during preparation.
- ◆ how fast the food cooled down to freezer temperature or refrigerator temperature.
- ◆ the temperature of the refrigerator or freezer.

Once leftovers are reheated, they should not be stored again. Throw away any reheated leftovers that are not eaten.

Take-home Storage Chart for Leftovers



| Food | Refrigerator (40° F) | Freezer (0° –10° F) |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| Fresh eggs in the shell | 4–5 weeks | Yolks do not freeze well alone. Mixed white with yolk can be frozen 1–2 months. |
| Eggs, liquid pasteurized or egg substitutes, opened | 3 days | Do not refreeze |
| Cooked meat, casseroles, soups and stews, gravy and meat broth | 1 day | 2–3 months |
| Cooked poultry, poultry dishes | 1–2 days | 4 months |
| Chicken nuggets, patties | 1–2 days | 1–3 months |
| Cooked fish | 1–2 days | 1 month |
| Hot dogs, opened package | 1 week | 1 month (wrapped) |
| Lunch meats, opened package | 3–5 days | 1 month (wrapped) |
| Baby food: | | |
| Strained fruits and vegetables* | 1–2 days | 6–8 months |
| Strained meats and egg yolks* | 1 day | 1–2 months |
| Meat-and-vegetable combinations* | 1–2 days | 3–4 months |
| Deli and vacuum-packed products: | | |
| Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, or macaroni salads | 3–5 days | These products do not freeze well. |
| Pre-stuffed pork and lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed with dressing | 1 day | |

* These storage times are for opened jars or homemade baby food. Follow the “use by” date for shelf storage of unopened jars.

Adapted from the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension bulletin, “Food Storage.”

What have you learned?

Circle the one right answer for each question:

1. When you have leftovers from a big pot of soup, you should:
 - a. Let it set at room temperature in the cooking pot until it cools, then put it in the refrigerator.
 - b. As soon as you turn the heat off, put the whole pot in the refrigerator.
 - c. Pour the hot soup into several small shallow containers, then put in the refrigerator.
 - d. Eat all you can while the soup is hot, then throw the rest away.

2. Cooked casseroles can be stored in the freezer for:
 - a. 1 year
 - b. 1 day
 - c. 2-3 months
 - d. can't freeze casseroles

3. When your family doesn't finish all the leftovers you reheated from last night's dinner, you should:
 - a. Put them back in the refrigerator.
 - b. Put them in the freezer.
 - c. Throw them away.
 - d. Leave them out until someone eats them.

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Adapted from *Eating Right is Basic* (Third Edition), 1995. Michigan State University Extension

