

It's important to take care how you store food, to make sure it's safe to eat.

Food that goes in the fridge



STORING

Some food needs to be kept in the fridge to help stop bacteria from growing on it, such as food with a 'use by' date, cooked food and ready-to-eat food such as desserts and cooked meats.

Make sure your fridge is cold enough

You need to make sure your fridge is cold enough otherwise food poisoning bacteria will still be able to grow. Your fridge should be between 0°C and 5°C.

If you're not sure how the temperature setting or dial works on your fridge, you could use a fridge thermometer to check it's the right temperature.

Here are a few other fridge tips that you might find useful:

- keep the fridge door closed as much as possible
- wait for food to cool down before you put it in the fridge
- if your fridge is full, turn the temperature down to help keep it cold enough

Keeping food in the fridge

To help stop bacteria from growing, remember:

- When the label says 'keep refrigerated', make sure you do keep the food in the fridge. If the food isn't labelled with any storage instructions and it's a type of food that goes off quickly, you should put it in the fridge and eat it within two days.
- Some jars and bottles need to be kept in the fridge once they've been opened. Always check the label and follow any storage instructions.
- When you're preparing food, keep it out of the fridge for the shortest time possible, especially when the weather (or the room) is warm.
- If you have made some food (such as a sandwich or a cold dish) and you're not going to eat it straight away, keep it in the fridge until you're ready to eat it.
- If you're having a party or making a buffet, leave the food in the fridge until people are ready to eat. Generally, you shouldn't leave food out of the fridge for more than four hours.

- Cool leftovers as quickly as possible (ideally within one to two hours) and then store them in the fridge. Eat any leftovers within two days, except for cooked rice, which you should eat within one day to help avoid food poisoning.

Uncooked potatoes are best kept somewhere cool and dry, but don't keep them in the fridge. This is because putting potatoes in the fridge can increase the amount of sugar they contain, which could lead to higher levels of a chemical called acrylamide when the potatoes are baked, fried or roasted at high temperatures.

Storing meat



It's especially important to store meat safely to stop bacteria from spreading and to avoid food poisoning.

- Store raw meat and poultry in clean sealed containers on the bottom shelf of the fridge, so they can't touch or drip onto other food.
- Follow any storage instructions on the label and don't eat meat after its 'use by' date.
- When you have cooked meat and you're not going to eat it straight away, cool it as quickly as possible and then put it in the fridge or freezer. Remember to keep cooked meat separate from raw meat.

Keeping food in the freezer

The freezer is a great tool for making sure you've always got some food in stock and for helping to avoid wasting food.

You can keep food safely in the freezer for years, in theory, as long as it has stayed frozen the whole time. However, the taste and texture of food changes if it's frozen for too long, so you might well find that it's not very nice to eat.

You can check any instructions on food labels or in your freezer's handbook (if you don't have this any more, you might be able to find it online) to see how long food should be frozen.

For safety, it's OK to freeze most raw or cooked foods providing you do the following things:

- freeze it before the 'use by' date
- follow any freezing or thawing instructions on the label

- thaw it in the fridge so that it doesn't get too warm. Or, if you intend to cook it as soon as it's defrosted, you could defrost it in a microwave
- try to use it within one to two days after it's been defrosted – it will go off in the same way as if it were fresh
- cook food until it's steaming hot all the way through

When frozen meat and fish (and some other foods) thaw, lots of liquid can come out of them. If you're defrosting raw meat or fish, this liquid will spread bacteria to any food, plates or surfaces that it touches. Keep the meat and fish in a sealed container at the bottom of the fridge, so that it can't touch or drip onto other foods.

Always clean plates, utensils, surfaces and hands thoroughly, after they have touched raw or thawing meat, to stop bacteria from spreading.

If you defrost raw meat or fish and then cook it thoroughly, you can freeze it again, but remember never reheat foods more than once.

Storing dry food, tins, jars and drinks



Many types of food don't need to be kept in the fridge to keep them safe to eat, for example dry foods such as rice, pasta and flour, many types of drinks, tinned foods, and unopened jars. But it's still important to take care how you store them.

Here are some tips:

- Try to keep food in sealed bags or containers. This helps to keep them fresh and stops anything falling into the food by accident.
- Don't store food or drinks near cleaning products or other chemicals.
- Don't use old food containers to store household chemicals, and don't store food in containers that have been used for other purposes.
- Only reuse plastic water bottles if they're not damaged and you can clean them.
- Don't store food on the floor, because this can encourage mice, ants and other pests.
- Keep the storage area dry and not too warm.
- Remember that some types of food might need to be kept in the fridge once you've opened them – follow any storage instructions on the label.

Tin cans

When you open a can of food and you're not going to use all the food straight away, empty the food into a bowl, or other container, and put it in the fridge.

Don't store food in an opened tin can, or re-use empty cans to cook or store food. This is because when a can has been opened and the food is open to the air, the tin from the can might transfer more quickly to the can's contents.

This advice doesn't apply to foods sold in cans that have resealable lids, such as golden syrup and cocoa, because these types of food don't react with the can.

Reducing waste

About a third of the food we buy in the UK ends up being thrown away. There are a few simple things we can do to reduce waste, save money and still make sure food is safe. The simplest thing is to try to make sure we don't buy or cook more food than we want to eat.

A lot of food gets thrown away because it is 'out of date'. You shouldn't use any food or drink after the end of the 'use by' date on the label, even if it looks and smells fine. This is because it could put your health at risk. But if you cook or freeze food before the end of the 'use by' date, you can keep it for longer.

'Best before' dates are more about quality than safety, so when the date runs out it doesn't mean the food will be harmful, it just means it might begin to lose its flavour and texture.

However, you shouldn't eat eggs after the 'best before' date.

Cling film and kitchen foil

Cling film

Cling film is useful for protecting food but, like many things, it needs to be used correctly.

Not every type of cling film is suitable for using with all foods. Check the description on the box to see what foods it can be used with.

There are three main points to remember when using cling film:

- Don't use cling film if it could melt into the food, such as in the oven or on pots and pans on the hob.
- You can use cling film in the microwave, but make sure the cling film doesn't touch the food.

- Only let cling film touch high-fat foods when the description on the box says the cling film is suitable for this. High-fat foods include some types of cheese, raw meats with a layer of fat, fried meats, pies and pastries, and cakes with butter icing or chocolate coatings.

Kitchen foil

Kitchen foil, which is made from aluminium, can be useful for wrapping and covering foods. But it's best not to use foil or containers made from aluminium to store foods that are highly acidic, such as:

- tomatoes
- rhubarb
- cabbage
- many types of soft fruit

This is because aluminium can affect the taste of these sorts of food, especially if they are stored in aluminium containers for a long time.