

Food Tips for Power Outages

Knowing what to do reduces your risk of a food-borne illness and minimizes the amount of food lost to spoilage. Bacteria grow rapidly at temperatures between 40–140° F, making food unsafe to consume.

Before:

1. Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator (making sure temperature is 40° F or lower) and freezer (0° F or lower) at all times.
2. Keep gel packs in freezer and freeze water in covered containers or 1-quart plastic storage bags for use in coolers or during emergencies.
3. Freeze leftovers, milk, and fresh meat (including poultry or seafood) you don't intend to use immediately (to keep them at a safe temperature longer in case the power goes out).
4. Keep foods close together in the freezer to help them stay cold longer.
5. Egg shells can be rubbed with mineral oil, placed back into their cardboard container, and set on a shelf in a cool, dark storage room for use within 3 months. (If you buy, store, and label an extra dozen eggs each time you purchase eggs, you can build up a 3-month supply.)
6. Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerated food cold if the power will be out 4 hours or more.
7. Store food on higher shelves that will be out of the way of contaminated water during flooding.
8. Know where to buy dry ice or block ice.
9. Have a few days' worth of ready-to-eat foods that require no cooking or cooling (like shelf-stable foods and canned goods with a manual can opener).

During the power outage:

1. Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain colder temperatures.
 - a. An unopened refrigerator keeps food cold for about 4 hours.
 - b. A full freezer with the door closed holds its temperature for about 48 hours (half-full for 24 hours, if packages are grouped together to protect each other).
2. Place meats on a tray in case they begin thawing, so the liquid doesn't drip on other items.
3. Place frozen gel packs, plastic storage bags, or small containers around items in refrigerator and freezer to help them stay cold or inside coolers if power is expected to be out longer than 4 hours.
4. Buy dry or block ice if the power is expected to be out for an extended period. (A fully stocked 18-cubic-foot freezer can be kept cold for 2 days with 50 pounds of dry ice.)
5. Never place food outdoors in the snow where it can be exposed to variable temperatures, unsanitary conditions, or animals (may harbor bacteria or disease). (Frozen food can thaw when exposed to the sun's rays, even when temperatures are very cold.)
6. Use snow to make ice by filling containers with water, placing them outside to freeze, and using them in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers.

When power is restored:

1. Check the temperature inside the refrigerator and freezer.
2. Discard any perishable food (meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, deli items, leftovers, soft cheeses, milk) that has been above 40° F for 2 hours or more (or after 4 hours without power).
3. Discard all items that have come in contact with raw meat juice.
4. Check each refrigerated item and discard if it feels warm to the touch or has an unusual color, odor, or texture. Don't rely solely on odor or appearance. When in doubt, throw it out.
5. Check freezer to see if it's 0° or lower. If not, check each item for ice crystals. Partially or completely thawed food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is below 40° F.
6. Take the temperature of any questionable foods with a food thermometer.
7. Dispose of all spoiled or questionable foods. Never taste a food to decide if it's safe.
8. If spoiled food has left an odor in the refrigerator or freezer, try this procedure:
 - a. Remove shelves, crispers, and ice trays and wash thoroughly in hot water and detergent.
 - b. Make a sanitizing solution of 1 tablespoon plain, unscented chlorine bleach per gallon of water.
 - c. Rinse shelves, crispers, and ice trays in the sanitizing solution.
 - d. Wash the interior of the refrigerator and freezer, including the door and gasket with hot water and baking soda and rinse with the sanitizing solution.
 - e. Leave the door open for 15 minutes to allow for air circulation.
 - f. Repeat the procedure until the odor is gone.

Food Safety during a Power Outage

Refrigerated Foods

Refrigerated foods need to be kept below 40° to be safe, so in the event of a power outage, temperatures may rise above this recommended temperature.

If over 40° for over 2 hours, take the recommended action. Keep a thermometer in fridge. Remember, when in doubt, throw it out.

* Indicates food with longer storage life and what to do if the refrigerator is 50° or higher for over 8 hours.

Food Item	Action
Baby formula - opened	Discard
Bacon	Discard
Bagels	Safe
Barbecue sauce	Safe
Biscuit dough	Discard
Blue cheese	Discard
Bread	Safe
Brie (soft cheese)	Discard
Broth	Discard
Butter	Safe
Buttermilk	Discard
Cake	Safe
Camembert (soft cheese)	Discard
Candied fruits	Safe
Canned fish - opened	Discard
Canned fruit - opened	Safe
Canned ham labeled "keep refrigerated"	Discard
Canned meat - opened	Discard
Casserole	Discard
Catsup	Safe
Cheddar cheese	Safe
Cheesecake	Discard
Cheese, low-fat	Discard
Cheese, processed	Safe
Cheese, shredded	Discard
Chicken, cooked or raw	Discard
Chicken salad	Discard
Coconut	Safe
Colby cheese	Safe
Cooked meat	Discard
Cookie dough	Discard
Cottage cheese	Discard

Food Item	Action
Cream	Discard
Cream cheese	Discard
Cream-filled pastries	Discard
Custard	Discard
Dates	Safe
Dressings, creamy - opened	Discard
Dressings, vinegar-based - opened	Safe
Dried beef	Discard
Dried fruits	Safe
Edam (soft cheese)	Discard
Egg dishes	Discard
Egg products	Discard
Egg salad	Discard
Eggnog	Discard
Eggs, fresh	Discard
Eggs, hard-cooked in shell	Discard
Evaporated milk	Discard
Fish, raw or cooked	Discard
Fish sauce	Discard
Fruit, dried	Safe
Fruit, fresh	Safe
Fruits, fresh, cut	Discard
Fruit juices, opened	Safe
Garlic in oil	Discard
Gravy	Discard
Greens, fresh pre-cut	Discard
Greens, fresh pre-washed	Discard
Greens, packaged	Discard
Ham	Discard
Herbs, fresh	Safe
Hoisin sauce	Safe
Horseradish - opened	Discard*

Charts adapted from: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/food-safety-during-power-outage>

Food Safety during a Power Outage

Refrigerated Foods (continued)

* Indicates food with longer storage life and what to do if the refrigerator is 50° or higher for over 8 hours.

Food Item	Action
Hot dogs	Discard
Jelly	Safe
Lettuce, pre-washed, packaged	Discard
Lunchmeat	Discard
Margarine	Safe
Mayonnaise - opened	Discard*
Meat, cooked	Discard
Meat, raw	Discard
Meat, thawing	Discard
Milk	Discard
Monterey Jack cheese	Discard
Mozzarella cheese	Discard
Muenster (soft cheese)	Discard
Muffins	Safe
Mushrooms, fresh	Safe
Mustard	Safe
Neufchatel (soft cheese)	Discard
Olives	Safe
Oyster sauce	Discard
Pancakes, cooked	Safe
Parmesan cheese, block or grated	Safe
Pasta with mayo or vinaigrette	Discard
Pasta, cooked or fresh	Discard
Pastries, cream-filled	Discard
Peanut butter	Safe
Pickles	Safe
Pie, chiffon or custard	Discard
Pie, fruit	Safe
Pizza with any topping	Discard
Potato salad	Discard
Potatoes, cooked or baked	Discard
Poultry, cooked or raw	Discard
Poultry, thawing	Discard
Processed cheese	Safe
Provolone cheese	Safe
Pudding	Discard
Queso blanco (soft cheese)	Discard
Queso fresco (soft cheese)	Discard

Food Item	Action
Quiche	Discard
Quick breads	Safe
Raisins	Safe
Raw meat	Discard
Refrigerator biscuits, raw	Discard
Relish	Safe
Rice, cooked	Discard
Ricotta (soft cheese)	Discard
Roll dough	Discard
Rolls	Safe
Romano cheese, block or grated	Safe
Roquefort cheese	Discard
Sausage	Discard
Seafood, cooked or raw	Discard
Shredded cheese	Discard
Shrimp salad	Discard
Soft cheese	Discard
Soup	Discard
Sour cream	Discard
Soy meat substitutes	Discard
Soy milk	Discard
Soy sauce	Safe
Spaghetti sauce - opened	Discard
Spices, fresh	Safe
Stew	Discard
Stuffing	Discard
Swiss cheese	Safe
Taco sauce	Safe
Tartar sauce, opened	Discard*
Tofu	Discard
Tortillas	Safe
Tuna salad	Discard
Vegetable juice - opened	Discard
Vegetables, cooked	Discard
Vegetables, raw	Safe
Waffles	Safe
Worcestershire sauce	Safe
Yogurt	Discard

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Frozen Foods

Many food items are safe if they still contain ice crystals and feel like they've been refrigerated. Some thawed foods held above 40° for over 2 hours are still safe, but others will need to be discarded.

* Discard after 6 hours above 40°.

** May have a loss of flavor or texture, but are still safe to eat.

Food Item	Ice Crystals	Thawed
Bagel	Refreeze	Refreeze
Bread	Refreeze	Refreeze
Bread dough	Refreeze**	Refreeze**
Cake	Refreeze	Refreeze
Casserole	Refreeze	Discard
Cheese, hard	Refreeze	Refreeze
Cheese, shredded	Refreeze	Discard
Cheese, soft/semi-soft	Refreeze**	Discard
Cheesecake	Refreeze	Discard
Convenience foods	Refreeze	Discard
Cornmeal	Refreeze	Refreeze
Custard or custard-filled cake, pie, or pastry	Refreeze	Discard
Dough	Refreeze	Refreeze
Egg (out of shell)	Refreeze	Discard
Entrée or frozen dinner	Refreeze	Discard
Fish	Refreeze**	Discard
Flour	Refreeze	Refreeze
Frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard
Fruit juice	Refreeze	Refreeze
Fruit, home or commercially packaged	Refreeze	Refreeze**
Ice cream	Discard	Discard
Meat pie	Refreeze	Discard
Meat (beef, pork, lamb, veal, ground meat)	Refreeze	Discard
Milk	Refreeze**	Discard
Muffins	Refreeze	Refreeze
Nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pancakes	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pie crust	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pizza	Refreeze	Discard
Poultry (chicken, turkey)	Refreeze	Discard
Rolls	Refreeze	Refreeze
Shellfish	Refreeze	Discard
Soup/stew	Refreeze	Discard
Vegetable juice	Refreeze	Discard*
Vegetables, home or commercially packaged	Refreeze	Refreeze**
Waffles	Refreeze	Refreeze