



Which Foods Can be Refrozen and Which Can't

When a storm knocks out electricity, people need to know when frozen foods are still safe to eat. University of Georgia experts warn that if certain foods aren't kept cold, they could be dangerous to your health.

Keep food cold

Ideally, when the power goes out, the first thing you should do is place a refrigerator/freezer thermometer in the freezer.

The recommended temperature for food storage in refrigerators is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or colder. University of Georgia Cooperative Extension experts say, if the freezer stays as cold as the refrigerator, many foods will be safe to use or refreeze.

Dry ice can also help save many foods in your freezer. A 50-pound block of dry ice will protect food in a 20-cubic foot freezer for three to four days.

The amount of food in the freezer will determine in part how long the food will stay frozen. The fuller the fridge, the longer the food will stay frozen while the power is off.

If it's packed, the freezer will hold its temperature about 48 hours if you don't open it. If it's half-full, it will hold its temperature only 24 hours. The question of safety becomes a bigger issue the longer you're without power.

Rule of thumb

Perishable foods need to be thrown away if their temperature or the freezer temperature rises above 40 degrees. Different foods have specific telltale signs for deciding what to keep and what to discard:

Meat and poultry. If the freezer stays 40 degrees or lower, meat and poultry may be refrozen if it has no signs of spoilage, such as off odor and off color.

If they have any sign of spoilage or the freezer or food has reached more than 40 degrees, dispose of them. If you don't have a thermometer, refreeze only the meat or poultry that still contains ice crystals.

If any foods in the refrigerator or freezer have come in contact with raw meat juices, throw them out, too.

Shellfish, vegetables and cooked foods. If the freezer maintains a temperature of 40 degrees or below or the food still has ice crystals, it may be refrozen. Otherwise, like meat and poultry, discard it. If any vegetables show signs of spoilage, throw them out, regardless of temperature.

Fruits. Fruits have the least amount of quality damage during thawing. If they don't show any signs of spoilage, you can safely refreeze them. However, the texture won't be the same after refreezing. Thawed fruits may be used in cooking or making jams, jellies or preserves.

Ice cream. Throw it out if it's partially thawed. Freezer or ice cream temperatures higher than 40 degrees could cause ice cream to be unsafe.

Creamed foods, puddings and cream pies. These are safe to refreeze only if the freezer has stayed 40 degrees or below. If it rises above 40, discard them.

Breads, doughnuts, cookies, cakes and nuts. These may be refrozen as long as they show no signs of mold growth. They typically refreeze better than most foods.

Shelf life of refrozen foods. If you plan to use the food that has been thawing in the freezer while the power is out, make sure it has maintained a temperature of 40 degrees or below. And use it within two to three days. Treat it as if you had been deliberately thawing it in the refrigerator.

While refrozen food is safe to eat if you follow these tips, you may need to offset some degree of quality loss by using it sooner than you may have originally planned.

Source: Elizabeth Andress, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension