

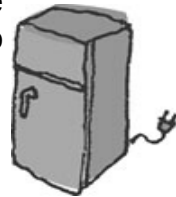


How to Handle Food When Your Freezer Fails

By Bob Guinn of *McClatchy Newspapers*

When the power goes out and your freezer and refrigerator are off, how do you know which foods are safe to eat? Since most foodborne illness is caused by bacteria that multiply rapidly at temperatures above 40 degrees, the key to keeping foods safe is to keep them at proper temperatures.

Never taste food to determine its safety. Some foods make look and smell fine, but if they've been at room temperature longer than two hours, bacteria able to cause foodborne illness can begin to multiply very rapidly.



Keeping It Cold

You may safely refreeze foods if:

- They still contain ice crystals; or
- They have not exceeded 40 degrees for two hours or more; or
- They have been held at refrigerated temperatures (40 degrees or less) no more than two days.

What to Toss?

The following foods should be discarded if kept more than two hours at above 40 degrees:



- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and egg substitutes (raw and cooked);
- Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, soy milk and yogurt;

- Soft, processed, shredded or low-fat cheeses;
- Casseroles, stews or soups;
- Cooked vegetables; baked potatoes;
- Lunch meats and hot dogs;
- Packaged, precut, prewashed greens;
- Creamy-based salad dressings, oyster sauce, garlic in oil mixtures;
- Opened containers of spaghetti sauce, vegetable juice;
- Custard, chiffon or cheese pies and quiche;
- Cream-filled pastries; and
- Refrigerated biscuits, rolls and cookie dough.



What to Save?

The following foods may be kept at room temperature for a few days:

- Butter or margarine;
- Hard and processed cheeses;
- Fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Dried fruits and coconut;
- Opened jars of vinegar-based salad dressing, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, ketchup, olives, pickles and peanut butter;
- Fruit juices
- Fresh herbs and spices;
- Fruit pies, bread, rolls and muffins;
- Cakes, except cream cheese-frosted or cream-filled; and
- Flour and nuts.

