

How to Store Food Safely



Food Safety Information Society

From the farm gate to the supermarket, the Canadian agri-food industry works to deliver a safe food supply to consumers. However, once food is purchased, it's the responsibility of the consumer to handle and store it safely to prevent spoilage, contamination and the development of foodborne bacteria that cause illness.

When shopping, check for “best before dates” on packages. Purchase only as much food as you can consume within the recommended period of time. Select shelf-stable items such as canned goods first. Buy refrigerated, deli and frozen foods just before checkout. Always buy food that is at the correct temperature. For example, foods from the dairy area should be cold and cooked foods like rotisserie chicken should be hot. Once you purchase food, go directly home and put cold perishables into the refrigerator or freezer. If this is not possible, store them in an iced cooler until you're able to get them home.

Bacteria multiply rapidly in what's called **The Danger Zone** between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F). So it's important for quality and food safety to keep refrigerated foods cold 4°C (40°F) or below. Cooked food should never be kept out of the refrigerator or oven for more than 2 hours. Cold temperatures keep food fresh and inhibit the growth of most bacteria. However, even when stored at the proper temperature, food spoilage microorganisms can still grow and multiply slowly. So there is a limit to the length of time food will taste fresh and be safe to eat. It's a good idea to label containers with the date purchased or cooked.

Be sure your food storage area, refrigerator and freezer are clean.

Once opened, store food in foil, plastic wrap, leak proof plastic bags or airtight containers to keep it from drying out or being contaminated.

Unfortunately, harmful bacteria and other contaminants that cause most cases of foodborne illness cannot be seen, smelled or tasted.

Remember, when in doubt, throw it out!

The storage times in the following charts are from the date of purchase and apply only when the food has been handled correctly.



BAKERY ITEMS

Bakery items containing custards, meat or vegetables or with frosting made of cream cheese, whipped cream or eggs must be kept refrigerated.

FOOD	SHELF	FRIDGE	FREEZER
Bread, commercial	2–4 days	7–14 days	1–3 months
Bread, pita	2–4 days	4–7 days	1–2 months
Cakes, angel food, sponge	1–2 days	5–7 days	2 months
Cakes, pound	3–4 days	5–7 days	2 months
Cakes, filled and frosted	no	1–2 days	2 months
Cheesecake	no	7 days	2–3 months
Cookies, bakery & homemade	2–3 weeks	2 months	8–12 months
Doughnuts, glazed & cake	1–2 days	5–7 days	1 month
Doughnuts, cream filled	no	3–4 days	no
Muffins, Danish pastries	1–2 days	7 days	2 months
Pies, cream	no	3–4 days	no
Pies, fruit	1–2 days	7 days	6 months
Pies, pumpkin	no	3–4 days	1–2 months
Rolls	3–4 days	7 days	2 months

FOODS PURCHASED FROZEN

When shopping, pick up frozen foods just before checking out. Take these foods directly home and place in freezer as soon as possible. Keep a thermometer in your freezer and check often that the temperature is safe -18°C (0°F). For optimum safety, thaw these foods in the refrigerator. But if time is short, defrost in a sink of cold water, changing the water every half hour. Or in the microwave following the appliance manufacturer’s directions and cook immediately.

FOOD	FREEZER	IN FRIDGE AFTER THAWING
Appetizers		
Battered cheese sticks	8 months	cook frozen
Battered vegetables	12 months	cook frozen
Battered zucchini	18 months	cook frozen
Meat balls	6 months	cook frozen
Mini egg rolls	18 months	cook frozen
Phyllo pastry wrapped appetizers	12 months	cook frozen
Quiche	12 months	cook frozen
Sausage rolls, cooked	4 months	cook frozen
Bread dough	see “best before date”	after baking, 4–7 days
Cookie dough	2–4 months	check label
Egg substitutes	see “best before date”	6–7 days

Foods Purchased Frozen

FOOD	FREEZER	IN FRIDGE AFTER THAWING
Fish		
Breaded, sauced	3 months	cook frozen
Raw, fat (salmon, lake trout)	2-3 months	1-2 days
Raw, lean (sole, cod, pike)	3-6 months	1-2 days
Fruit (berries, melons)	4-6 months	4-5 days
Fruit juice concentrate	6-12 months	7-10 days
Ice cream (in refrigerator freezer)	1 month	no
Ice cream (in chest freezer)	2-4 months	no
Lamb roasts	8-10 months	3-4 days
Lamb chops	8-10 months	2-3 days
Meat patties, beef	2-3 months	cook frozen
Pancakes, waffles	2 months	3-4 days
Pastry dough	2-3 months	1 day
Perogies	3 months	check label
Pizza	1-2 months	1 day
Potatoes, French-fried	4-8 months	no
Poultry		
Chicken & turkey, whole	12 months	2 days
Chicken & turkey, parts	6 months	2 days
Chicken & turkey, ground	2-3 months	1 day
Breaded, cooked	6 months	cook frozen
Breaded, uncooked	6 months	cook frozen
Breaded portions, stuffed/sauced	6 months	cook frozen
Sausages		
Precooked	1-2 months	7 days
Uncooked	1-2 months	1-2 days
Sherbet, frozen yogourt	2-4 months	no
Shrimp, shellfish, raw	2-3 months	1-2 days
Smoked fish	2 months	1-2 days
Prepared meals		
TV dinners	3 months	cook frozen
Breakfasts	3 months	cook frozen
Entrees	3 months	cook frozen
Vegetables	8-12 months	cook frozen
Whipped topping	6 months	2 weeks



FOODS PURCHASED REFRIGERATED

Keep a thermometer in your refrigerator and check often that the temperature is below 4°C (40°F). Some bacteria grow and multiply, although very slowly even at these temperatures. So, foods will stay fresh and safe for a limited period of time. If you do not plan to use them right away, it's best to freeze foods right after purchasing. Raw juices from meat, poultry and fish can contain bacteria. Place packages of these foods on trays to prevent their juices dripping onto other foods.

FOOD	REFRIGERATED	FROZEN
Beverages, fruit, cartons, bottles		
Opened	7–10 days	
Unopened	3 weeks	
Unpasteurized	1 day	
Bread		
Pizza crusts	see “best before date”	3 months
Tortillas	see “best before date”	1–2 months
Tube cans, biscuits, rolls	see “best before date”	do not freeze
Cookie dough, unopened, opened	see “best before date”	2–4 months
Dairy Products		
Butter		
Salted, unopened	12 weeks	6 months
Salted, opened	3 weeks	6 months
Unsalted, unopened	8 weeks	6 months
Unsalted, opened	3 weeks	6 months
Cheese		
Cheese, firm, unopened	3–6 months	
Cheese, firm, opened	3–4 weeks	
Cheese, firm, sliced	2 weeks	
Cheese, grated, unopened	see “best before date”	
Cheese, grated, opened	5 days	
Cheese, semi-soft, unopened	see “best before date”	
Cheese, semi-soft, opened	2–3 weeks	
Cheese, soft, unopened	see “best before date”	
Cheese, soft, opened	1 week	
Cheese, processed, unopened	3 months	3 months
Cheese, processed, opened	3–4 weeks	
Cheese, processed spread, unopened	3–4 years	
Cheese, processed spread, opened	2 months	
Cottage Cheese, Ricotta, Quark	see “best before date”	no
Cream cheese	see “best before date”	no
Cream cheese dips and spreads		
Unopened	see “best before date”	
Opened	10 days	

Foods Purchased Refrigerated

FOOD	REFRIGERATED	FROZEN
Cream		
Whipping	see "best before date"	no
Aerosol can, real whipped cream	3–4 weeks	no
Eggnog, commercial	see "best before date"	6 months
Milk, homogenized	see "best before date"	3 months
Milk, buttermilk	see "best before date"	
Sour cream	see "best before date"	
Yogourt		
Unopened	see "best before date"	
Opened	7–10 days	1–2 months
Deli Foods		
Meats and sausages, sliced	2–3 days	
Stuffed cabbage rolls	2–3 days	
Chicken, turkey, sliced	1–2 days	
Meat pies	2–3 days	
Rotisserie chicken	3–4 days	3 months
Salads	1–2 days	
Sausage rolls	2–3 days	
HMR Home Meal Replacements		
Beef pot roast	These products are evolving. Many are prepared	
Cooked roast pork	and packaged in different ways. Check for a	
Cooked turkey	"best before date" and storage information	
Turkey gravy	on the label.	
Stuffing		
Eggs, whole	see "best before date"	
Egg whites	see "best before date"	
Fish/Shellfish		
Anchovies, opened	3–4 days	3 months
Fish, fatty, raw (salmon, lake trout)	2–3 days	2–3 months
Fish, lean, raw (sole, cod, pike)	2–3 days	3–6 months
Fish, cooked	1–2 days	4–6 months
Shellfish, raw crab & lobster	12–24 hours	2 to 3 months
Shellfish, raw, unshelled, shrimp	1–2 days	2 months
Shellfish, raw, shelled, shrimp & scallops	1–2 days	3 months
Shellfish, cooked, unshelled, shrimp	1–2 days	2 months
Shellfish, raw & cooked, unshelled, clams, mussels	3 days	2 months
Shellfish, raw & cooked, shelled, clams, mussels	3 days	3 months
Shellfish, oysters, live	1 day	4 months
Smoked salmon (fresh lox)	1–2 days	2 months



Foods Purchased Refrigerated

FOOD	REFRIGERATED	FROZEN
Margarine, unopened	8 months	6–12 months
Margarine, opened	1–3 months	
Meat, fresh		
Ground meat	1–2 days	2–3 months
Beef roasts	3–4 days	10–12 months
Beef steaks	2–3 days	10–12 months
Lamb roasts	3–4 days	8–10 months
Lamb chops	2–3 days	8–10 months
Pork roasts	3–4 days	8–10 months
Pork chops, ribs	2–3 days	8–10 months
Sausages	1–2 days	1–2 months
Veal roasts	3–4 days	4–5 months
Veal chops	2–3 days	4–5 months
Variety meats, liver, kidneys	1–2 days	3–4 months
Meat, smoked or processed		
Bacon	6–7 days	1–2 months
Ham, fully cooked, whole	6–7 days	no
Ham, fully cooked, slices	3–4 days	no
Ham, cook before eating	6–7 days	no
Hot dogs, unopened	2 weeks	2–3 months
Hot dogs, opened	7 days	2–3 months
Lunch meats, packaged	see “best before date”	1–2 months
Sausages	7 days	2–3 months
Pasta, fresh	see “best before date”	1–2 months
Pizza	see “best before date”	
Poultry, Fresh		
Ground chicken and turkey	24 hours	2–3 months
Chicken & turkey, whole	2 days	1 year
Chicken & turkey, parts	2 days	6 months
Chicken giblets	2 days	3–4 months
Duck, goose, whole	1–2 days	3 months
Soups	see “best before date”	2–3 months
Soy fortified beverage, opened	see “best before date” or 5–7 days	
Tofu cakes, unopened	see “best before date”	3 months
Tofu cakes, opened (changing water daily)	5–7 days	
Vegan meat alternatives, unopened	see “best before date”	4 months after “best before date”
Vegan meat alternatives, opened	4 days	4 months after “best before date”
Vegan single servings entrees	see “best before date”	no



FRESH PRODUCE – FRUITS

Fruits are safe at room temperatures, but after ripening they will mold and spoil quickly. So store ripe fruit in the refrigerator. Or most fruit can be frozen, following directions in a reliable freezing guide. Storage life of most home frozen fruit is 6 –12 months, depending on the fruit.

FRUITS	SHELF	FRIDGE
Cut fruit, fruit cups	no	1–2 days
Apples, in season, in perforated plastic bag	no	2 months
Apples out of season	no	2 weeks
Apricots, uncovered	until ripe	1 week
Avocados	until ripe	2–5 days (ripe)
Bananas	until ripe	2 days (ripe)
Blueberries, loosely covered	no	10 days
Cherries	no	3 days
Cranberries, uncovered	no	1–2 weeks
Grapefruit, covered	no	1 month
Grapes	no	5 days
Kiwifruit, covered	until ripe	1–2 weeks (ripe)
Lemons, limes, covered	1 week	1 month
Mangos	until ripe	3 days (ripe)
Melons		
Most types, whole, ripe, covered	until ripe	3 days (ripe)
Most types, precut, tightly sealed	no	2– 3 days
Watermelon, whole	few days	1 week (ripe)
Watermelon, precut, tightly sealed	no	up to a week
Nectarines, uncovered	until ripe	1 week (ripe)
Oranges, loosely covered	1 week	1 month
Papaya	until ripe	1 week (ripe)
Peaches, uncovered	until ripe	1 week (ripe)
Pears, uncovered	until ripe	3–7 days (ripe)
Pineapple, uncovered		2–3 days
Plums	until ripe	5 days (ripe)
Raspberries, loosely covered		2 days
Rhubarb		3 days
Strawberries, loosely covered		2 days
Tangerines, loosely covered		1 week



FRESH PRODUCE – VEGETABLES

Dense raw vegetables such as potatoes and onions may be stored at cool room temperatures. Other vegetables should be refrigerated for quality and food safety. Or most vegetables can be frozen, following directions in a reliable freezing guide. Storage life of most home frozen vegetables is 10 – 12 months.

VEGETABLES	SHELF	FRIDGE
Artichokes, sprinkle with water		1 week
Asparagus, wrap in damp towel or stand in water		4–5 days
Beans, green and wax, covered		5 days
Beets, tops cut to 1 in (2.5 cm), covered		3–4 weeks
Broccoli, covered		5–7 days
Brussels sprouts		5–7 days
Cabbage, green & red, covered		2 weeks
Carrots, mature, covered		3–4 weeks
Carrots, young, covered		2 weeks
Cauliflower, covered		7–10 days
Celery, covered		2 weeks
Corn on the cob, if husked, wrap in damp towel in plastic bag		2–7 days
Cucumbers		1 week
Eggplant		5 days
Garlic		
uncovered	few weeks – 4 months	
minced, packed in oil, unopened	1 year from production date	
minced, packed in oil, opened		1 year from production date
Ginger root		2 weeks
Greens		
Lettuce varieties		1 week
Others		2–4 days
Greens, bagged, precut		see “best before date”
Herbs, fresh		4–7 days
Mushrooms, in paper bag		5 days
Onions		
Green, leeks		1 week
Storage. dry, yellow skin	3 weeks	
Sweet, uncovered	1 week	1 month
Parsnips, covered		4 weeks
Peas		1–4 days



Fresh Produce – Vegetables

VEGETABLES	SHELF	FRIDGE
Peppers		
Sweet		1 week
Hot, in paper bag		1–2 weeks
Potatoes		
New, in paper bag		1 week
Mature, in paper bag	1 month	
Sweet potatoes / yams, uncovered	2–3 weeks	
Pumpkins, uncovered	1 week	
Radishes		1 week
Rutabagas, uncovered	1 week	3 weeks
Spinach		3–4 days
Sprouts		3–4 days
Squash		
Summer, (soft shell) zucchini		1 week
Winter (hard shell)	1 week	
Tomatoes	until ripe	2–3 days (ripe)
Turnips, covered		1 week



SHELF STABLE FOODS

If necessary, after opening transfer these foods to an air-tight bag or container. For freezing, package in a freezer-proof bag or wrap. Some foods must be refrigerated after opening so check the label. Do not buy open packages of food or cans of food that bulge at the ends, leak or are badly dented. Store shelf stable foods in a clean, dry, cool place.

FOOD	UNOPENED IN PANTRY	OPENED IN PANTRY	OPENED IN FRIDGE
Baby food	see "best before date"	no	2–3 days
Baby formula, concentrated liquid	see "best before date"	no	1 day
Baby formula, powder	see "best before date"	1 month	
Baby formula, prepared or ready to serve	see "best before date"	no	48 hours
Baking ingredients			
Baking powder	12 months		
Baking soda	12 months		
Cornmeal	6–12 months		12 months
Cornstarch	18 months	18 months	
Extracts, vanilla, lemon	2–3 years	12 months	
Flour			
White	6–12 months	6–8 months	
Whole wheat	3 months		6–8 months
Frosting, canned	10 months		1 week
Frosting mix	12 months	3 months	
Mixes			
Cake, tea biscuit	12 months		
Pancake	6–9 months		
Yeast, dry	see "best before date"		
Bread crumbs, dry	3 months		
Canned foods, low acid	2–5 years		3–4 days
Canned foods, high acid	12–18 months		5–7 days
Cereals			
Ready-to-eat	8 months	3 months	
Rolled oats	6–10 months	6–10 months	
Granola	6 months		
Wheat germ			1 yr after production date
Cheese, processed cheese spread	8 months		
Chocolate, baking squares, dark	2 years	2 years	
Chocolate, baking squares, white	13 months	13 months	
Chocolate chips	2 years	2 years	
Chocolate syrup	2 years		6 months
Cocoa	10–12 months		
Coffee			
Beans, non vacuum bag	1–3 weeks		3 months (freezer)
Ground	2–4 weeks	2 weeks	
Instant	12 months		

Shelf Stable Foods

FOOD	UNOPENED IN PANTRY	OPENED IN PANTRY	OPENED IN FRIDGE
Coffee whitener	6 months		
Condiments			
Asian sauces	12 months		4–6 months
Barbecue sauce	12 months	1 month	4–6 months
Horseradish in jar	12 months	no	3–4 months
Ketchup	12 months	1 month	6 months
Mayonnaise, commercial	see “best before date”		6–8 weeks
Mustard	12 months		12 months
Olives, black & green	12–18 months		2 weeks
Pickles	12 months		1–2 months
Salsa	12 months		2 weeks
Worcestershire sauce		1 year	
Cookies, packaged	2 months		1 month
Crackers	6 months		
Cranberry sauce			3 weeks
Dried beans, peas, lentils	12 months	12 months	
Fish and shellfish	12 months		2 days
Fruit, dried	6 months	6 months	
Gelatin, all types	12 months		
Herbs, dried	6–12 months		
Honey, pasteurized	2 years		
Jams & jellies	12 months		6 months
Juice boxes	4–6 months		8–12 days
Marshmallows, marshmallow crème	2–4 months		1 month
Milk, buttermilk powder	6 months		1 month
Milk, condensed	9–12 months		4–5 days
Milk, evaporated	9–12 months		4–5 days
Milk, skim milk powder,	6–12 months		1 month
Milk, UHT	see “best before date”		7 days
Molasses	1–2 years	6 months	
Mushrooms, dried	6 months		3–6 months
Nuts			
In shell	4 months		
Out of shell		2 weeks	
Nutmeats, in vacuum can	12 months		
Nutmeats, other packaging	3 months	2 weeks	
Nuts, unsalted			9–12 months
Nuts, salted			6–8 months
Oils			
Butter-flavored hydrogenated	12 months	9 months	no
Canola	12–18 months	6–9 months	12 months
Cold press	no	no	6 months
Corn oil	12–18 months	6–9 months	10–12 months
Flaxseed oil, unopened	no	no	3 months
Flaxseed oil, opened	no	no	3 weeks

FOOD	UNOPENED IN PANTRY	OPENED IN PANTRY	OPENED IN FRIDGE
Oils (cont)			
Grapeseed, refined	18–20 months	6–8 months	12 months
Olive oil, extra virgin	9–12 months	6–7 months	12 months
Peanut oil	12 months	6–7 months	12 months
Pumpkin oil	7 months	2–3 months	4–6 months
Safflower oil	12 months	9 months	18 months
Salad dressings, commercial	see “best before date”		see “best before date” or 3 months
Sesame oil	12 months	8–9 months	16 months
Solid vegetable shortenings	6 months	10–12 months	12 months
Soybean oil	12–18 months	6–9 months	12 months
Sunflower oil	9 months	3–6 months	6–8 months
Vegetable oil sprays	12–24 months	12 months	no
Walnut oil	7 months	3–4 months	6–8 months
Pasta	several years		
Peanut butter	6–9 months	2–3 months	
Pectin, Powdered	see “best before date”		
Pectin, Liquid	see “best before date”		1 month (covered)
Pie filling, pudding mix	18 months		
Popcorn	2 years		
Potato flakes	6–12 months		
Rice, white	several years		
Rice, brown	6 months		
Rice, flavored	6 months		
Sauces and gravy mixes	6–12 months		
Soup mixes	12 months		
Soy drink	see “best before date”		5–10 days
Spices, whole	3 years		
Spices, ground	1–2 years		
Sugar			
Brown	4 months		
Confectioners	18 months		
Granulated	2 years		
Artificial sweetener	2 years		
Syrups – corn, table	12 months	12 months	
Syrups – maple	12 months		
Tahini	12–18 months	90–120 days	longer
Tea, Bags	12–18 months		
Tea, Loose	2 years		
Tomato & pasta sauce, cans, jars	12 months	no	5 days
Tomatoes, sun dried	12 months		
Tomatoes, sun dried, in oil, opened	4 months		
Vinegar	2 years	1 year	
Toaster pastries	2–3 months		
Yeast, dry	see “best before date”		

HOME COOKED FOODS

Refrigerate cooked foods as soon as possible after a meal. Once the foods have cooled, cover with lids or plastic food wrap. Then use them quickly or freeze as they have a short shelf life. If you have any doubts about the safety of a leftover food, throw it out.

FOOD	IN FRIDGE	FROZEN
Antipasto	10 days	12 months
Baby formula, correctly prepared	48 hours	no
Cheese ball	1 week	
Cheesecake, baked		6 months
Chicken & turkey gravy	1–2 days	2–3 months
Cooked fish	1–2 days	4–6 months
Cooked meat	3–4 days	2–3 months
Cooked chicken & turkey	3–4 days	3 months
Cooked rice & noodles	3 days	3 months
Cranberry sauce	3 weeks	1 year
Eggnog	1 day	no
Eggs, hard cooked	1 week	no
Eggs, leftover whites	1–2 days	1 year
Eggs, leftover yolks and whites	2–3 days, covered	4 months
Herb and garlic flavored oils, fresh	2–3 days	no
Homemade herb & garlic flavored oils, heat processed correctly	1 month	no
Meat casseroles, pies	2–3 days	3 months
Potatoes, cooked, mashed	3 days	
Pies, unbaked, fruit	no	6 months
Soups, meat or vegetable	3–4 days	2–3 months
Sandwiches	overnight	6 weeks
Turkey stuffing	3–4 days	3 months



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