

What to Do if There's an Outage

- **Keep the refrigerator door closed.** Put needed food and drinks in a cooler with ice or gel packs and tell your family the refrigerator is off limits. A closed refrigerator will keep foods cold enough for about four hours.
- **Group frozen foods together to keep them cold longer.** Add bags or blocks of ice if the freezer isn't full or add dry ice to keep the ice box as close to 0 degrees as possible. A full freezer will stay cold for up to 48 hours while a half-full freezer will stay cold for about 24 hours. After filling the freezer with ice, keep the door closed.
- **Prepare coolers for prolonged outages.** Place perishable food in coolers and surround items with ice or gel packs. If outdoor temperatures are cold enough, place securely closed containers of water outside to make additional ice. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says coolers with food should not be placed outdoors because temperatures vary hour to hour and animals may contaminate the food.



Questions and Answers

- Q:** What if the power goes out while I'm at work or out of the house and more than two hours have passed?
- A:** Try to determine when the power went out. Take the temperature of your food with the quick-response thermometer. If the temperature of an item has been above 40 degrees for more than two hours, throw the item away. (Check the chart for guidelines.) If freezer foods are below 40 degrees and they still have ice crystals, they can be refrozen.
- Q:** What if the power goes out and comes on while I'm away from home?
- A:** A full freezer with the door closed should keep food cold for 48 hours. The texture of some foods may not be the same. If the refrigerator has been off for two hours or longer check the chart for guidelines.
- Q:** What if I go to bed and the power still isn't on?
- A:** Leave a bedroom light on that will wake you when power is restored so you can check the temperature of your food.

The Power Is Out: Should I Throw Out My Food?



Be Prepared: What to Have in Case of an Outage

- **Coolers.** Metal coolers keep food colder longer, but inexpensive Styrofoam will do. Have several coolers on hand.
- **Ice or freezer gel packs.** Have enough ice or gel packs ready. Know where to obtain dry ice.
- **Non-perishable food and manual can opener.** Canned and packaged food, juice, and milk can be consumed at room temperature or heated on a grill, or over canned fuel in a chafing or fondue dish.
- **Appliance and quick-response food thermometers.** An appliance thermometer will indicate if the temperatures inside the refrigerator and freezer are cold enough. A quick-response food thermometer will measure the internal temperature of meats, milk, and other foods.



Food You Should Refreeze or Discard After a Power Outage

When storms or accidents cause the power to go out, customer-owners want to know how long they can safely keep refrigerated and frozen foods. If a power outage lasts two hours or less, you don't need to worry, but most perishable foods kept above 40 degrees for more than two hours should be discarded.

As soon as the power returns, check temperatures. If the food in the freezer has ice crystals, and is not above 40 degrees, you can refreeze it. Use this chart to know what you can keep and what you should toss.

While reviewing the chart, please use your discretion.

Frozen Foods	Still Contains Ice Crystals, Not Above 40 Degrees	Thawed, Held Above 40 Degrees for More Than Two Hours
<i>Meat and Mixed Dishes:</i>		
Beef, veal, lamb, pork, poultry, ground meat and poultry	Refreeze	Discard
Casseroles with meat, pastas, rice, egg or cheese, stews, soups, convenience foods, pizza	Refreeze	Discard
Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	Refreeze. May be some texture and flavor loss	Discard
<i>Dairy:</i>		
Milk	Refreeze. May lose some quality	Discard
Egg products	Refreeze	Discard
Ice cream, frozen yogurt	Discard	Discard
Cheese (soft and semi soft) cream cheese, ricotta	Refreeze. May lose some texture	Discard
Hard cheese (cheddar, Swiss, parmesan)	Refreeze	Refreeze
<i>Fruits and Vegetables:</i>		
Fruit juices	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell, or sliminess develops
Home or commercially packaged fruit	Refreeze. Will change texture and flavor	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell, or sliminess develops
Vegetable juices	Refreeze	Discard if above 40 degrees for more than six hours
Home or commercially packaged or blanched vegetables	Refreeze. Will change texture and flavor	Discard if above 40 degrees for more than six hours
<i>Baked Goods and Baking Ingredients:</i>		
Flour, cornmeal, nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pie crust, breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (no custard fillings)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Cakes, pies, pastries with custard or cheese filling	Refreeze	Discard
Commercial and homemade bread dough	Refreeze. May lose some quality	Refreeze. Considerable quality loss

Adapted from "A Consumer's Guide to Food Safety," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, 2007.

Refrigerator Foods	Foods That are Still Cold and Held At 40 Degrees or Above for Less Than Two Hours	Held Above 40 Degrees for More Than Two Hours
<i>Dairy, Eggs, and Cheese:</i>		
Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt	Keep	Discard
Butter, margarine	Keep	Keep
Baby formula, opened	Keep	Discard
Eggs, egg dishes, custards, puddings	Keep	Discard
Hard and processed cheeses	Keep	Keep
Soft cheeses, cottage cheeses	Keep	Discard
<i>Fruits and Vegetables:</i>		
Fruit juices, opened: canned fruits opened, fresh fruits	Keep	Keep
Vegetables cooked, vegetable juice opened	Keep	Discard
Baked potatoes, potato salad	Keep	Discard
Fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices	Keep	Keep
Raw vegetables	Keep	Keep
<i>Meat, Poultry, and Seafood:</i>		
Fresh or leftover meat, poultry, fish, or seafood	Keep	Discard
Lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, sausage, and dried beef	Keep	Discard
Canned meats or fish, opened	Keep	Discard
Canned hams labeled "Keep Refrigerated."	Keep	Discard
<i>Mixed Dishes and Side Dishes:</i>		
Casseroles, soups, stews, pizza with meat	Keep	Discard
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken or egg salad	Keep	Discard
Cooked pasta, pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinegar base	Keep	Discard
Gravy, stuffing	Keep	Discard
<i>Pies and Breads:</i>		
Cream or cheese filled pastries and pies	Keep	Discard
Fruit pies	Keep	Keep
Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads	Keep	Keep
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough	Keep	Discard
<i>Sauces, Spreads, Jelly:</i>		
Mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish	Keep	Discard if above 50 degrees for more than eight hours
Opened salad dressing, jelly, relish, taco and barbecue sauce, mustard, catsup olives	Keep	Keep