

Cooling Foods



Germs are more likely to grow in food when the food is between the temperatures of 40 °F and 140 °F. Therefore, it is unsafe to let a cooked food cool too slowly. Read on to learn safe methods for cooling cooked foods and tips on storing cooled foods.

Safe Cooling Tips for Large Amounts of Food

Small amounts of hot food do not take long to cool. Put them in sealed containers and place them directly in the refrigerator.

Large batches of food need extra care. Even in the refrigerator, they may stay warm for hours, which gives germs more time to grow. Also, placing large containers of hot food directly into the refrigerator may warm the refrigerator to unsafe temperatures (above 40 °F).

One way to cool a large amount of food quickly is to divide it into smaller batches:

- Cut roasts, turkeys, and other large pieces of meat into smaller slices (about 2 to 3 inches thick) before wrapping the food and placing it in the refrigerator.
- Divide large pots of chili, stew, and soup into small, shallow containers.

How Long Can Cooked Food Safely Stay at Room Temperature?

To limit the growth of germs, cooked foods should not sit at room temperature for more than 2 hours. If the air temperature is 90 °F or higher, do not leave foods out for more than 1 hour.

If food is left out longer than the safe time span, throw it away.

Ice baths are another way to cool large amounts of food quickly. This method works well for soups and stews.

- Fill the kitchen sink halfway with cold water and ice.
- Place the container of hot food into the ice water. (Warning: Do not use a glass or ceramic dish. It may break when the temperature changes quickly from hot to cold.)
- Stir the food once in a while to help it cool evenly.

Storing Food in the Refrigerator

Once the food is cool enough, store it safely in the refrigerator:

- Wrap the cooled food in plastic or aluminum foil, or use airtight storage containers.
- Label the food with the date you put it in the refrigerator.
- Do not stack containers of leftover food. Stacking makes it difficult for cold air to surround the containers and cool the food quickly.
- Use the food within a few days (see the chart for storage time limits).

Storage Time Limits for Refrigerated Leftovers

Type of Cooked Food	Use Within
Fresh vegetables	3 to 4 days
Pasta	3 to 5 days
Rice	7 days
Sliced ham	3 to 4 days
Beef, poultry, fish, and seafood	3 to 4 days
Gravy and broth	3 to 4 days
Soups, casseroles, and stews	3 to 4 days
Stuffing	3 to 4 days

Source: www.homefoodsafety.org/tips-spring

