

Leftovers and Food Safety

If you are making a lot of meals at home or ordering family style meals from restaurants, how should you deal with the leftovers? We've got tips for safely storing and reheating all the leftovers you've got piling up.

You might have leftovers from the takeout you ordered or after all the family dinners you've cooked this week. Whatever the case, proper handling of leftovers is essential to avoid any risk of foodborne illness. You should refrigerate leftover food as soon as possible and reheat it to a safe temperature before eating again. Follow the guidelines below to ensure the safety of your leftovers.

Refrigerate or freeze quickly. Do not allow leftovers to sit at room temperature for longer than 2 hours. This includes travel time from the restaurant. Throw out any food that has been sitting out for longer than 2 hours.

Wrap well. Cover leftovers tightly with plastic wrap or store them in airtight containers. This will help keep bacteria out and maintain the best quality.

Reheat safely. Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees F. Always use a food thermometer to make sure the food has reached this temperature. You can reheat in the microwave, on the stove-top, or in the oven. You can safely reheat frozen leftovers without thawing first, just allow for a little longer cooking time.

- **Microwave reheating** – cover food when reheating in the microwave in order to maintain moisture. You may even want to add a little water or broth to improve quality. Rotate and stir the food midway through cooking to ensure even heating. Allow the food to rest for at least a minute before checking the temperature.
- **Stove-top reheating** – cover food to help retain moisture. Bring soups, sauces, and gravies to a rolling boil before eating. Adding liquid may improve quality.

Store safely. You should eat leftover food stored in the refrigerator within 3 to 4 days. You should eat frozen leftovers within 3 to 4 months. Be sure to label and date before storing. When in doubt, throw it out.

Reference: https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/leftovers-and-food-safety/ct_index

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