

FOOD SAFETY IN A POWER OUTAGE

Sudden power outages can be frustrating and troublesome, especially when they are prolonged. Perishable foods should not be held above 40° F for more than two hours. If a power outage is two hours or less, you need not be concerned, but how do you save your food when the refrigerator is out for longer times? Being prepared can help. By planning ahead, you can save your perishables.

What do I need?

- One or more coolers. Inexpensive styrofoam coolers can do an excellent job as well.
- Shelf-stable foods, such as canned goods and powdered or boxed milk. These can be eaten cold or heated on the grill.
- A digital quick-response thermometer. A digital thermometer should be a necessity in your kitchen anyway. With these thermometers you can quickly check the internal temperatures of food for doneness and safety.

What to do...

- Do not open the refrigerator or freezer. Tell your little ones not to open the door. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods cold enough for a couple of hours at least. A freezer that is half full will hold for up to 24 hours and a full freezer for 48 hours.
- If it looks like the power outage will be for more than two to four hours, pack refrigerated milk, dairy products, meats, fish, poultry, eggs, gravy, stuffing and left-overs into your cooler surrounded by ice.
- If it looks like the power outage will be prolonged, prepare a cooler with ice for your freezer items.

Qs and As

What should be discarded after a power outage? As soon as the power returns, check temperatures. If the food in the freezer has ice crystals and is not above 40° F you can refreeze. Perishable foods in the refrigerator should not be above 40° F. for more than two hours. [Use this chart](#) to see what has to be discarded and what can be kept.

What if I go to bed and the power is still not on? Before you go to bed, pack your perishables into your coolers if you haven't already done so and put in as much ice as you can. Also, when you go to bed, leave a bedroom light switched on. When the power goes back on, it will wake you, so you can check the condition of your foods in the freezer.

What if the power goes out while I'm at work or out of the house and it has been more than a few hours before I get home? Try to determine how long the power has been out. Check the internal temperature of the food in your refrigerator with your quick-response thermometer. A liquid such as milk or juice is easy to check. Spot check other items like steaks or left-overs also. If the internal temperature is above 40° F, it is best to throw it out.

What if the power goes out and comes back on while I am out? If your freezer is fairly full and you know it was not longer than 24 hours, the food should be OK. There will be loss of quality with refreezing, but the food will be safe. If the refrigerator was out for more than two to four hours, it is best to discard the perishables.

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Frozen Foods

Meat, Mixed Dishes	Contains Ice Crystals, Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Beef, Veal, Lamb, Pork, Poultry, Ground Meat and Poultry	Refreeze	Discard
Casseroles with Meat, Pasta, Rice, Egg or Cheese Base, Stews, Soups, Convenience Foods, Pizza	Refreeze	Discard
Fish, Shellfish, Breaded Seafood Products	Refreeze	Discard
Dairy	Contains Ice Crystals, Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Milk	Refreeze	Discard
Eggs (out of shell), Egg Products	Refreeze	Discard
Ice cream, Frozen Yogurt	Discard	Discard
Cheese (Soft and Semi-Soft), Cream Cheese, Ricotta	Refreeze	Discard
Hard Cheese (Cheddar, Swiss, Parmesan)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Fruits, Vegetables	Contains Ice Crystals, Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Fruit Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.
Home or Commercially Packaged Fruit	Refreeze	Refreeze. Discard if mold, yeasty smell or sliminess develops.
Vegetable Juices	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° for over eight hours.
Home or Commercially Packaged or Blanched Vegetables	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° for over eight hours.
Baked Goods, Baking Ingredients	Contains Ice Crystals, Not Above 40° F	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Fruit Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze
Flour, Cornmeal, Nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pie Crusts, Breads, Rolls, Muffins, Cakes (no Custard Fillings)	Refreeze	Discard if above 50° for over eight hours.
Cakes, Pies, Pastries with Custard or Cheese Filling, Cheesecake	Refreeze	Discard
Commercial and Homemade Bread Dough	Refreeze	Refreeze

Refrigerator Foods

Dairy, Eggs, Cheese	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F or Above Under Two Hours	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
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 Cheese	Keep	Discard
Fruits, Vegetables	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F or Above Under Two Hours	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Fruit Juices (opened), Canned Fruits (opened), Fresh Fruits	Keep	Keep
Vegetables (cooked), Vegetable Juice (opened)	Keep	Discard after six hours.
Baked Potatoes	Keep	Discard
Fresh Mushrooms, Herbs, Spices	Keep	Keep
Garlic (chopped in oil or butter)	Keep	Discard
Meat, Poultry, Seafood	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F or Above Under Two Hours	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Fresh or Leftover Meat, Poultry, Fish, Seafood	Keep	Discard
Lunchmeats, Hot Dogs, Bacon, Sausage, Dried Beef	Keep	Discard
Canned Meats (not labeled "Keep Refrigerated" but refrigerated after opening)	Keep	Discard
Canned Hams (labeled "Keep Refrigerated")	Keep	Discard
Mixed Dishes, Side Dishes	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F or Above Under Two Hours	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
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
Pies, Breads	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F or Above Under Two Hours	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Cream or Cheese Filled Pastries and Pies	Keep	Discard
Fruit Pies	Keep	Keep
Breads, Rolls, Cakes, Muffins, Quick Breads	Keep	Keep
Refrigerator Biscuits, Rolls, Cookie Dough	Keep	Discard
Sauces, Spreads, Jams	Food Still Cold, Held At 40° F or Above Under Two Hours	Thawed, Held Above 40° F for Over Two Hours
Mayonnaise, Tartar Sauce, Horseradish	Keep	Discard
Open Salad Dressing, Jelly, Relish, Taco Sauce, Barbeque Sauce, Mustard, Catsup, Olives	Keep	Keep