

Perishable Non-Frozen Foods

Refrigeration can substantially reduce the rate at which food will deteriorate. Low temperatures slow down the growth of micro-organisms and the rate of chemical changes in food. The temperature in a frost-free refrigerator is fairly even, however in a moist air refrigerator the coolest part of the refrigerator is near the coils. Thermometers made especially for refrigerators and freezers are available from some department stores and are a worthwhile investment.

Uncooked minced meat, liver, kidneys, poultry and seafood need careful storage because they always carry large numbers of spoilage and possibly food poisoning micro-organisms. Some of these micro-organisms can grow even at refrigeration temperatures, so always store these foods in the coldest part of the refrigerator as close as possible to 0°C. The longest recommended storage time is 3 days. To kill any food poisoning bacteria which may be present, always cook minced meat thoroughly to a temperature above 75°C.

Wrapped fresh meat can be kept safely for up to 3 days and un-wrapped fresh meat up to 5 days at cold temperatures 0°-3°C. Whole red meats (e.g. leg of lamb) and cured meats have a longer storage life, and unwrapped meats last longer than wrapped meats. Wrapped meat maintains its original high water content and quality but surface growth of micro-organisms is encouraged and the meat becomes slimy after about 4 days and an "off" odour can become apparent.

Unwrapped meat keeps longer – fresh meat for up to 5 days and cured meat for up to 3 weeks at 0°-3°C. The meat surface dries out. This retards microbial growth but causes undesirable colour changes and loss of flavour. However, this is preferable to meat going off because it is wrapped.

Refrigeration Hints

Throw out food which is going off because putting it in a colder part of the refrigerator will not stop it deteriorating further. It can taint other food. Store food you want to keep for a long time, or items like seafood which are quite susceptible to spoilage, in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

Cover all cooked foods and store them on a shelf above uncooked goods. This minimises the risk of food poisoning organisms being transferred from uncooked to cooked foods through drip.

Foods with strong odours, such as seafood and some cheeses, should be wrapped and you should avoid storing them for long periods near food such as milk and cream which are susceptible to tainting. Some flexible films are effective barriers to the transmission of odours but they are not readily available to consumers. The common cling wrap films are not very effective, but they are useful in the short term and stop spillages. Closed glass or plastic containers are preferable.

Brought to you by Peninsula Bulk Meats

Source of Information: Australian Meat Industry Council, Australian Pork Limited, Meat & Live Stock Australia and Tanner Couch Calendars.