



COOKING

&

KITCHEN TIPS

The Refrigerator - Food Safety Center

Why all the fuss about refrigeration? The answer is simple: bacteria growth is slowed in very cold conditions. Your refrigerator is the safety center of the kitchen. If you keep your refrigerator temperature low enough, you can slow down bacterial growth.

The best way to determine storage temperature is to keep a thermometer in the warmest part of the refrigerator. Check it regularly to make sure it is between 32 degrees and 40 degrees. Check the refrigerator every day to make sure nothing is spoiling and contaminating other food or creating odors. Cover all foods before you put them in the refrigerator.

Store meats and dairy products in the coldest area. Refrigerate fresh meats immediately. Refrigerate prepared food, including leftovers, immediately after cooking. Never leave food standing at room temperature to cool. If you must cool the dish somewhat, put it in a pan of ice cold water. Foods cool more quickly loosely covered or uncovered. Cooled foods should be covered to prevent contamination and to maintain quality.

Recook mixtures containing meat, poultry or fish before you serve them. This is especially important because ground or cut meat has more surface exposed to the air and bacteria can get at it more easily. Also, rehandling increases the chance of contamination.

Dairy products and food containing eggs provide favorable environments for bacterial growth. This is why you must cover and refrigerate custard-filled pies and pastries at all times. Put custard, cream and similar fillings into the pie shells at 140 degrees or above; promptly cool to 45 degrees or less.

Don't expect your refrigerator to do more than it was intended to do. The refrigerator can inhibit the ability of bacteria to spread or produce a poison, but some food mixtures and very perishable foods will still deteriorate quickly, even in the refrigerator.

Keep your refrigerator clean inside and out. Clean interior surfaces with warm, soapy water. Then rinse and wipe with a mild chlorine bleach solution of one tablespoon chlorine bleach to one quart water.

Source: NDSU Extension Service Nutrition Specialists

