

Healthy Eating

Freeze food for later

Make more than you need and freeze foods in portion sizes for future meals. Here's how according to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension specialists:

STEP 1.

Cool foods “slightly” at room temperature before refrigeration. A food does not need to be completely cool before it is refrigerated. To help it cool slightly before refrigeration, place a shallow container of food (no deeper than 2 inches) on a cooling rack to allow air to circulate around the pan for about 20 to 30 minutes.

STEP 2.

Cool foods to refrigerator temperature before bagging them for your freezer. LOOSELY cover food in the refrigerator. This allows heat to escape and protects the food from accidental contamination from other foods during cooling.

STEP 3.

Pack foods into freezer containers or freezer bags. Use “freezer” bags, not “storage” bags, for storing food in the freezer. Freezer bags are thicker than storage bags and will keep the food fresh longer.

Speed freezing and hasten thawing by freezing foods in a thin, flattened shape in freezer bags. A rounded shape takes longer to thaw through to the middle. Flatter packages also stack better in your freezer.

To avoid spilling food or getting it stuck in the closure of the freezer bags, use a wide-mouth funnel. Place the freezer bag in a container such as a quart measuring cup. Stand the bag upright if you are filling it with a more liquid-type food. You may wish to double-bag liquids as an added precaution against leakage.



STEP 4.

Label foods. To avoid mystery meats and other foods of unknown age, label foods using freezer tape, gummed freezer labels or permanent marking pens/crayons. Include the name of the food, packaging date, number of servings or amount, and helpful hints (sliced, chopped) or special ingredients.

Place filled freezer bags on a flat surface in your freezer, such as on a metal pan. **Do not stack freezer bags until frozen so they will freeze faster.** After they are frozen solid, remove the bags from the pan. Store and stack the bags right on the freezer shelf. Or turn them on their edge and store them vertically. This is an especially good idea when freezing liquid foods, such as soups and stews.

STEP 5.

Thaw and cook frozen foods. **DO NOT** thaw perishable foods at room temperature. If these foods are left at room temperature too long, bacteria may grow and produce heat-resistant toxins that can cause food-borne illness. Cooking may not be able to destroy these toxins. It's best to plan ahead for slow, safe thawing in the refrigerator overnight. Up to 5 pounds of food should thaw in about 24 hours. Or food may be transferred from a freezer bag to a microwave safe container for thawing in the microwave.