

Letter from the Chef

Happy Thanksgiving to All!

The holiday season is here! Can you believe it? With Thanksgiving and Christmas right around the corner, there will be a lot of cooking taking place in our homes. I received positive feedback about the letter on the subject of dating opened condiments, shelf life of leftovers and other refrigeration information from a few months back ([See Page 3](#)). In light of this, I thought we would expand a little more on the topic as we move into the Holiday season and we are looking to do our food shopping and/or prepare large meals in advance.

Let's discuss some different food items and their shelf life: fresh, frozen and canned.

Fresh & Frozen Foods:

We all know refrigerators and freezers are different, but how does the temperature variance affect food quality and viability? How often do you open your refrigerator and freezer? How do you wrap your food before putting it in the refrigerator or freezer? All those items play a role in storing your food properly. Bottomline is always smell the items, then take a look at it... if you don't like the smell or look, don't eat it! [See page 4 for list of storage times for refrigerator and freezer.](#)

For fresh meats that are being stored in the refrigerator, cover them so they are air tight and the light is kept off them. Fresh meats should be cooked within 24 hours of purchase or wrapped properly and put in the freezer. When preparing meats for the freezer, either wrap them in plastic wrap and then wrap in foil, or you can wrap in parchment paper and then butcher paper. On the foil (or butcher paper), write the type of meat it is and the date you put it in the freezer. I recommend that you use that meat within 3 weeks of when you put it in the freezer. You will likely see a loss in quality after that time. Fresh poultry that is frozen will last longer than the 3 weeks if it is wrapped tight to keep air and ice off it.

Fresh fish is wonderful! When you purchase fresh fish, bring it home and place it in a slotted pan (a pan with holes in it), then put another pan under it. Cover the fish with plastic, then ice. Fish stored properly can last up to 4 days, but you must pour off the water and add more ice each day. Please note this is only doable if the fish was fresh when you got it! You can prepare fish for the freezer the same way you do meat. In my opinion, after 2 weeks the quality of the fish decreases, and it dries out more as the time passes.

For any frozen item, defrost it properly! Perishable foods should never be thawed on the counter or in hot water. In addition, do not leave them out at room temperature for more than 2 hours. There are 4 recommended ways to thaw items. If possible, please use refrigerator thawing as it is the safest.

[See page 5 proper methods of thawing.](#)

Canned Goods:

I was questioning how long canned foods are good for, so we found some information for you that I thought was interesting. [See page 6 for information on canned goods.](#) My thoughts after reviewing it:

First, all of the cans used for foods are lined with an epoxy resin. It is my opinion that we are exposed to and digest large amounts of plastics in our foods as it is (water bottles, milk cartons, plastic wraps, bowls, containers), so I'm not in agreement with the statement about BPA. Eat fresh foods when you can.

Next, when was that food item manufactured and canned? How long has it been on the store shelves? Those are questions that always come to mind for me....so even though they say something is good for months or years, I would say eat it quickly. Make it a practice to date your cans when you purchase them and put them in your cabinet. After a time, if you don't feel like you are going to use them in a timely manner (and they have been stored properly), pull them out to donate to your local food pantry.

I hope you have found this information helpful as you begin to prepare your home and table for the Holidays.

Have a wonderful Holiday Season,

Kurt Wolfe
Chef/Owner of Elements Restaurant

Refrigeration Chart	
Food	Refrigeration Time
Hot Dogs and Luncheon Meats	
Hot Dogs	Unopened, 2 weeks Opened, 1 week
Luncheon Meat	Unopened, 2 weeks Opened, 3-5 days
Deli and Vacuum-Packed Products	
Egg, Chicken, Tuna, Ham, and Macaroni Salads	3-5 days
Pre-stuffed Pork, Lamb Chops and Chicken Breasts	1 day
Store-cooked Dinners and Entrees	3-4 days
Cooked Meat, Poultry and Fish Leftovers	
Pieces and Cooked Casseroles	3-4 days
Gravy and Broth, Patties and Nuggets	3-4 days
Soups and Stews	3-4 days
Eggs	
Hard-cooked	1 week
Liquid pasteurized Eggs, Egg substitutes	Unopened, 10 days Opened, 3 days
Cooked Egg dishes	3-4 days
Mayonnaise, commercial	2 months
Condiments & Other	
Ketchup	9-12 months
Mustard	About 1 year after opening
Juices	Depends to a large extent on storage conditions. On average, Apple Juice (example) that is continuously refrigerated after opening will keep for about 7-10 days.

Food Storage in Refrigerator and Freezer Chart		
Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
Soups/Stews		
Vegetable or Meat-added & mixtures of them	3 - 4 days	2 - 3 months
Bacon & Sausage		
Bacon	7 days	1 month
Sausage, raw from Pork, Beef, Chicken or Turkey	1 - 2 days	1 - 2 months
Smoked Breakfast Links, Patties	7 days	1 - 2 months
Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb, & Pork)		
Steaks	3 - 5 days	6 - 12 months
Chops	3 - 5 days	4 - 6 months
Roasts	3 - 5 days	4 - 12 months
Variety meats (Tongue, Kidneys, Liver, Heart, Chitterlings)	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
Meat Leftovers		
Cooked Meat & Meat dishes	3 - 4 days	2 - 3 months
Gravy & Meat Broth	1 - 2 days	2 - 3 months
Fresh Poultry		
Chicken or Turkey, whole	1 - 2 days	1 year
Chicken or Turkey, parts	1 - 2 days	9 months
Giblets	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
Cooked Poultry, Leftover		
Fried Chicken	3 - 4 days	4 months
Cooked Poultry dishes	3 - 4 days	4 - 6 months
Pieces, plain	3 - 4 days	4 months
Pieces covered with Broth, Gravy	3 - 4 days	6 months
Chicken Nuggets, Patties	3 - 4 days	1 - 3 months
Fish & Shellfish		
Lean Fish	1 - 2 days	6 - 8 months
Fatty Fish	1 - 2 days	2 - 3 months
Cooked Fish	3 - 4 days	4 - 6 months
Smoked Fish	14 days	2 months
Fresh Shrimp, Scallops, Crawfish, Squid	1 - 2 days	3 - 6 months

INFORMATION FROM THE FDA – PROPER METHODS FOR THAWING

Refrigerator Thawing

- Planning ahead is the key because a **large frozen Turkey** requires at least 24 hours for every 5 pounds.
- Small amounts of frozen food — such as a **pound of Ground Meat** or boneless **Chicken Breasts** — require a full day to thaw
- Food will take **longer** to thaw in a refrigerator set at **35 °F** than one set at **40 °F**.
- After thawing in the refrigerator, items such as **Ground Meat, Stew Meat, Poultry, and Seafood**, should remain safe and good quality for an additional day or two before cooking.
- **Red Meat** cuts (such as Beef, Pork or Lamb Roasts, Chops and Steaks) should remain safe and good quality 3 to 5 days.
- Food thawed in the refrigerator can be refrozen without cooking, although there may be some loss of quality.

Cold Water Thawing

- This method is **faster** than refrigerator thawing but **requires more attention**.
- The food must be in a **leak-proof package or plastic bag**. If the bag leaks, bacteria from the air or surrounding environment could be introduced into the food. Also, the meat tissue may absorb water, resulting in a watery product.
- The bag should be submerged in cold tap water, changing the water every **30 minutes** so it continues to thaw.
- **Small packages** of Meat, Poultry or Seafood — about a **pound** — may thaw in **1 hour** or less.
- A **3-to 4-pound package** may take **2 to 3 hours**. For whole Turkeys, estimate about 30 minutes per pound.
- Once thawed, food must be **cooked immediately**. Foods thawed by the cold-water method should be **cooked before refreezing**.

Microwave Thawing

- After **thawing** in the microwave, always **cook immediately**, whether microwave cooking, by conventional oven, or grilling.
- Holding **partially** cooked food is **not recommended** because any bacteria present wouldn't have been destroyed and, indeed, the food may have reached optimal temperatures for bacteria to grow.
- Foods thawed in the microwave should be cooked before refreezing.
- Also, never thaw foods in a garage, basement, car, dishwasher or plastic garbage bag; out on the kitchen counter, outdoors or on the porch. These methods can leave your foods unsafe to eat.

Cooking Without Thawing

- It is **safe** to cook foods from the **frozen state**.
- The **cooking** will take approximately **50% longer** than the recommended time for fully thawed or fresh meat and poultry.

Remember: Even though the center of the package may still be frozen as it thaws on the counter, the outer layer of the food could be in the "**Danger Zone**," between 40 and 140 °F — temperatures where bacteria multiply rapidly.

To reiterate a previous statement, I only recommend Refrigerator Thawing. Yes, cold water thawing, microwave thawing and simply cooking without thawing are safe if done correctly. However, with any type of forced thawing there comes a loss in quality of your food product.

Canned Food: Shelf Life, Storage and Other Tips Chart

Canned Foods Information

Food Type	Examples of Food	Shelf Life
High Acid Foods	Tomatoes, Fruit, Pickles	Best quality up to 18 months; up to 2 years
Low Acid Foods	Carrots, Pumpkin, Potatoes, Peas	Best quality up to 2 years; up to 5 years
Meats	Tuna, Ham	Best quality up to 3 years; up to 6 years

Proper Storage can allow you to keep canned foods up to double the “Best Quality” shelf life

Tips and Other Information for Storing Canned Foods/Dry Goods

Store in a cool, clean, dry place with temperatures between 50° - 70° F (Not cold enough to freeze; can be above 70°F up to 85°F, but not recommended for prolonged periods of time).

High temperatures (100° F and higher) are harmful to canned foods. The risk of spoilage jumps sharply as storage temperatures rise. Prolonged storage of 75° F can cause nutrient loss. Light can cause changes in color and nutrient loss in food in jars.

Never put canned foods or other shelf-stable items:

- Above the stove
- Under the sink
- In a damp garage or basement

Food reacts chemically with the metal container over time. This is especially true for high-acid food. This corrosion over time causes taste and texture changes; eventually affecting the nutritional value of food.

Cans or metal lids on glass jars CAN rust with time. When rust is deep enough, tiny holes open in the can or lid that may let spoilage agents in. Shipping accidents that **dent** or **crush** cans also cause problems.

Foods kept longer than “Best Quality” will be safe to eat if cans are stored properly and do not show signs of spoilage.

Do not leave ingredients such as Flour and Brown Sugar in their original packaging.

- Transfer to see-through containers that will keep them fresh and help you identify the contents

Signs of Spoilage

Loose or bulging lids on jars	Foul odor coming from can or jar
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Bulging, leaking or badly dented cans (especially along top, side and bottom seams)

Plastic Lining for Canned Goods

Did you know practically all cans – from those filled with food to other products like beverages and makeup – are lined with a product called “Epoxy Resin”? It is an important plastic lining that helps to protect food and beverages from the contamination of dissolved metals and from spoilage due to bacteria. The epoxy resin lining can be white, yellow or clear. This lining is controversial as it contains a chemical compound called Bisphenol A, also known as BPA. Though BPA is considered toxic, a very minute amount leaches into the food or beverage. The estimated dietary intake of BPA from the epoxy resin coating is said to be less than 0.00011mg per 1kg of body weight per day. In other words, an average adult would have to eat 230kg or approximately 500lbs of canned food and beverage for most of their life span before exceeding the safe levels of BPA set by the Environmental Protection Agency.