

Are These Leftovers Still Safe to Eat?



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These days, most of us are cooking at home and enjoying restaurant takeout and delivery more often.

You and your family might be wondering, are leftovers still safe to eat? When should you throw them away? Should you freeze them or store them in the fridge? Eating food that has spoiled on the counter or in the fridge can lead to gastroenteritis (bacterial and viral infections), stomach upset, diarrhea, and vomiting. But, consuming spoiled food can easily be avoided if you follow food safety guidelines.

For details on how long specific foods can last in the fridge before they go bad, try the free FoodKeeper app offered by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. I

recommend that you also pay attention to packaging expiration dates for store-bought items.

Keep cooked food hot or cold—not room temp.

After food is safely cooked, hot food must be kept at 140° F or hotter to prevent bacterial growth. Use a probe thermometer, so you're not guessing if your food has dipped below this temperature. Cold perishable food, such as chicken salad or a platter of deli meats, should be kept at 40° F or below.

Throw away all perishable foods that have been left at room temperature for more than two hours (or one hour if the environmental temperature is above 90° F, such as at an outdoor picnic during the summer).

Safely store leftovers - here's how.

When you finish a home-cooked meal or arrive home with a restaurant doggie bag, store your leftovers in the fridge or freezer within two hours.



Your fridge's internal temperature should be kept at 40° F or below to keep perishable items thoroughly chilled and to avoid bacterial growth. Cover leftovers by wrapping them in airtight packaging or seal them in containers.

Where you store items in your fridge also matters. Place the least perishable foods

on the fridge door because that's the warmest area of the fridge. Many refrigerators are equipped with special drawers designed to store fresh produce. These drawers limit excessive moisture and preserve freshness.

Throw away opened, cooked, and prepared foods that have been in the fridge for more than four days.

If you want your leftovers to last longer (up to four months), freeze them soon after they are cooked or prepared. Freezing stops bacterial growth at the time the item is frozen. Once the food is thawed, bacteria start growing again from where it left off prior to freezing. Safely thaw frozen food in the refrigerator, under cold water, or in the microwave—not on the counter.

For more details, visit the FDA website about leftovers and food safety.

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“Poop colors often vary according to the foods and liquids that you consume,” Dr. Pearlman says. “Some colors, however, may signify certain conditions that require medical attention.” [Read more.](#)