

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

STOCKING YOUR FREEZER

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*Janie Burney, PhD, RDN, Professor and Nutrition Specialist
Family and Consumer Sciences*

You, like many Americans, are making fewer trips to the store to avoid spreading COVID-19. If you are running out of space in your refrigerator for that extra gallon of milk or dozen eggs, try freezing them. Freezing is a good way to store food safely.

Does freezing kill viruses like COVID-19?

The freezing process does not kill viruses and bacteria that may be present in food. Instead, it slows their metabolic processes as if they are asleep. Once the food thaws, these microbes become active again.

When freezing food, be sure to:

- Set your freezer to 0 F or lower.
- Use proper freezing containers or packaging.
- Choose foods that freeze well.

If you freeze food correctly, it will be safe indefinitely. However, some foods lose their quality over time.

Freezer Temperature

Always keep the temperature in your freezer set at 0 F or below to freeze foods safely. A refrigerator/freezer thermometer placed in your freezer can help you monitor the temperature regularly.

Freezer Packaging

Foods must be packaged properly to protect their flavor, color, moisture content and nutrition. Freezer containers or packaging must be moisture and vapor resistant,



Milk and eggs can be frozen, but eggs must be removed from the shell.

and durable and leakproof. They should not become brittle and crack. They should be easy to seal and easy to label.

Rigid Containers

Glass and plastic designed for freezing are good choices, especially for liquids. They can be stacked easily to save room and food can be removed easily. If you plan to thaw food in the microwave, use glass such as glass canning jars or glass storage containers designed for freezing. Regular glass jars may break in the freezer. Be sure to leave room between the surface of the food and the lid, called the headspace, to allow contents to expand. Covers should fit tightly. Use freezer tape, if necessary, to reinforce the seal.

Bags and Wrapping

Plastic freezer bags, freezer wrap and heavy-weight aluminum foil work well for dry packed foods with little or no liquid. Bags can also be used for liquid packs. When using bags, press to remove as much air as possible before closing. Vacuum packaging can be used for foods with little or no liquid and can save space in the freezer. Always keep vacuum packed foods in the freezer to avoid the risk of botulism.

Unsuitable Containers

Cardboard cartons used for milk, cottage cheese and ice cream are not suitable for long-term freezer storage. They may not be sufficiently moisture-vapor resistant. However, if that is what you have, they can be lined with a freezer bag or wrap. It is fine to store milk in plastic jugs, just be sure that the lid is securely fastened.



Plastic freezer bags, plastic and glass containers, freezer wrap and heavy-weight aluminum foil work for freezing.

Foods to Freeze

Many foods can be frozen. Just keep in mind that there may be some texture and flavor changes. If these changes are undesirable, use the foods in cooked dishes.

Dairy Products

Milk. Milk can be frozen for later use. Just be sure to leave enough headspace in the container for it to expand. If you are freezing a full container, pour out some in a smaller container. Use within a month or

two for best quality. Fat can separate in some milk, so stir it well before using.

Butter and Margarine. Freezing works best if butter or margarine is in sticks rather than tubs as tubs may crack. Transfer sticks to freezer bags or wrap in freezer paper or foil.

Cheese. Hard or semi-hard cheeses can be frozen. Freezing may cause cheese to be crumbly and a little dry but it is fine for cooking. Allow 24 to 48 hours for the cheese to thaw. This helps moisture return to the cheese. Freeze shredded cheese in the package. Divide blocks of cheese into one to one and a half pound portions. Wrap in plastic and enclose in freezer bags.

Cottage cheese, cream cheese and cheese food products (sauces, dips, processed cheese). These can be frozen but their high water content make them grainy when thawed.

Eggs

Freezing is often unnecessary because they can be stored for at least a month.

Whole eggs. Remove from the shells and thoroughly mix yolks and whites. Try not to whip in air. Add 1 tablespoon of sugar or 1/2 teaspoon salt per cup of eggs to prevent graininess. Strain through a sieve or colander. Package leaving headspace of half an inch.

You can also use ice trays. Measure tablespoons of egg mixture into compartments. Freeze until solid. Remove from the tray and store in bags or containers.

Egg yolks. Stir gently and add 2 tablespoons sugar or 1 teaspoon salt per cup of egg yolks. Strain through a sieve and Package leaving headspace of half an inch.

Egg whites. Gently mix and strain through a sieve. Package leaving headspace of half an inch.

Flour

White flour can be stored for several months, which may make freezing unnecessary. Whole-wheat and other whole-grain varieties have oils that can go rancid over time so they may stay fresher when frozen. If you do freeze flour, use freezer bags and be sure to bring the flour up to room temperature before baking.

Foods That Do Not Freeze Well

Some foods do not freeze well at home due to their high water content or their tendency to separate. These include:

- Cabbage, celery, cucumbers, endive, lettuce, parsley, radishes
- Irish potatoes, baked or boiled
- Cooked macaroni, spaghetti or rice
- Egg whites, cooked
- Meringue
- Icings made from egg whites
- Cream or custard filings
- Milk sauces
- Sour cream

- Crumb toppings
- Mayonnaise or salad dressing
- Gelatin
- Fruit jelly
- Fried foods

Spices and seasonings may not freeze well due to flavor changes.

- Pepper, cloves, garlic, imitation vanilla and some herbs become strong and bitter after freezing
- Onion and paprika change flavor
- Celery seasoning becomes stronger
- Curry may develop a musty flavor

Additional Information

Freezing Foods, University of Tennessee Extension publication, PB 1483, provides information on how to freeze fresh produce and other foods.

The National Center for Home Food Preservation, <https://nchfp.uga.edu>, provides instructions for freezing many foods.



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