

Leftover Lifetimes

TIME AND TEMP LIMITS FOR KEEPING FOOD SAFE

Leftovers can be a lifesaver when you need a meal in a hurry, but unfortunately they don't last forever. Or even a long time. And no, turning leftovers into another kind of leftover does not extend the life of the original food. Keeping food at proper temperatures and storing it for limited times is paramount for food safety. Label and date your leftovers, and check your fridge often and purge as required.

First, whether you're serving a family meal or you're setting out food when entertaining, be sure to **keep perishable food at room temperature no longer than 2 hours (1 hour if you're outdoors and the temp is over 90°F)**. Bacteria that cause foodborne illness multiply rapidly at temperatures in the "Danger Zone" (temperatures between 40°F and 140°F), rendering food potentially unsafe. Food that is not eaten during this timeframe should be promptly refrigerated or frozen.

Most leftover foods will last in the refrigerator for **3 to 4 days**. After that time, leftovers should be tossed. And it should go without saying that any food that is obviously spoiled (it smells unpleasant, or is discolored or moldy or abnormally soft) should be immediately thrown out, no matter how long it has been stored.

One of the most basic food safety practices is: **When in doubt, throw it out.**

For more information on storing food and beverages, visit **The FoodKeeper page** at <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app>, where you can browse by category or use the search function to look up something specific. There's also a **FoodKeeper mobile app** available for Android and Apple devices.

Brought to you by the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County
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