

The 2-Hour Rule

KEEP PERISHABLE FOOD SAFE BY OBSERVING ROOM TEMP TIME LIMITS

One of the basic maxims of food safety is **keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold**. Not keeping perishable food hot enough (at or above 140°F) or cold enough (at or below 40°F) allows bacteria to multiply quickly, causing the food to become unsafe. Thus, when preparing or serving perishable food, it's important that it not be left at room temperature for more than two hours. If the temperature is above 90°F (such as when you're entertaining outdoors), don't leave food out for more than one hour. Food left out for more than these time limits should be discarded.

Care should also be taken when defrosting frozen foods, as pathogenic bacteria can multiply as the food begins to defrost when left at room temperature. Thaw frozen foods in the fridge or under cold running water, not at room temperature.

To recap:

- **Do not leave perishable food at room temperature for more than two hours (one hour if the temperature is above 90°F).**
- This goes for food that is freshly cooked, or leftovers remaining after serving a meal or entertaining. Store foods in shallow containers and refrigerate or freeze promptly.
- Defrost frozen food safely in the refrigerator – not at room temperature.

For further information, visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) website at <https://nchfp.uga.edu> or contact your local Cooperative Extension office.

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