

# HOME ECONOMICS GUIDE



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## Storing Meat and Poultry in the Freezer

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### Temperature

Keep the home freezer temperature at 0 degrees F (-18 C). At this temperature foods will keep their quality. At warmer temperatures, the color and texture of food changes. Keep a thermometer in the freezer to check the temperature. The 0 degrees F (-18 C) should be the temperature in the warmest part of the freezer. In other words, the temperature in the area near the door is probably going to change more than other parts because warm air enters when the door is opened. This is especially true with an upright freezer. If this area is kept cold, then other areas will also be cold enough. See Home Economics Guides 4456 "Freezers—Selection" and 4457 "Freezers—Use and Care".

### Packaging

Package meat and poultry in meal size portions.

● **Meat.** By having meal size packages in the freezer, thawing time can be saved and meal planning will be easier.

Put a double layer of freezer paper between steaks, chops or patties frozen in the same package so they can be separated to thaw.

● **Poultry.** Halves, pieces or quarters of poultry can be prepared a variety of ways for special recipes or barbecues. You may want to freeze some in each of these ways. Do not stuff poultry you want to freeze. Food spoilage occurs easily in stuffed, frozen poultry.

### Wrapping

- Keep food to be frozen very clean in order to keep harmful bacteria from causing spoilage. Freezer temperatures only stop the growth of bacteria. During thawing, harmful bacteria will grow rapidly.
- Use moisture-vapor proof wrap, such as heavy aluminum foil, heavy waxed freezer paper, specially laminated paper, airtight waxed cartons, freezer bags, rigid plastic or waxed cardboard containers.
- Label each package with date, kind and type of product, and weight or number of servings. Most store wraps on

fresh meat are not suitable for long-term (over 2 weeks) freezing. Remove the meat tray. Rewrap.

- Do not use ordinary waxed paper.
- Do not use light weight aluminum foil. It punctures easily.

If the package is not wrapped carefully, freezer burn results. This means that air dries the meat and the meat also loses flavor.

*The Drug Store Wrap*



1. Use enough paper so the edges may be folded down at least three times.
2. Place the meat in the center of the paper.
3. Separate individual servings with sheets of freezer paper so they will come apart easily before cooking.
4. Bring two edges of paper together above the meat and fold down in ½-inch to 1-inch folds until the paper is tight against the meat.
5. Press the wrap closely to the meat to force out air.
6. Seal edges carefully with freezer tape, or fold over ends at least twice and tie securely.

### Amounts

Freeze only the amount of fresh meat or poultry that will freeze within 24 hours.

Figure 2 to 3 pounds for each cubic foot of freezer space as a safe amount to freeze at one time.

For example, about nine 2½ pound chickens could be put in 9-cubic-foot freezer at one time to be frozen.

Place the packages in the freezer so that air can move between them. This way packages will freeze faster. If your freezer has shelves with freezer coils or a "quick freeze" area, use this space for fast freezing.

If you have 50 chickens or a side of beef to freeze, spread the project over several days or have the freezer plant freeze it for you.

Cool hot food before freezing. Hot food will heat the freezer and need a longer time to freeze.

## Quick Freezing

Quick freezing means rapidly freezing the products. In fast freezing small ice crystals form and good quality is maintained.

For quick freezing:

1. The home freezer temperature should be at least 0 degrees F (-18 C) or lower. Food locker plants and the food industry do quick freezing at much colder temperatures.
2. The amount to be frozen at any one time should be limited.
3. The freezer temperature should be constant and not go above 0 degrees F (-18 C).

Slow freezing occurs when the freezer temperature gets above 0 degrees F (-18 C) or when too much is put into the freezer at the same time. In slow freezing, the moisture in meat and poultry forms large ice crystals. The large ice crystals break the cells and fibers in the meat. When these meats are defrosted, more juice is lost and the texture is not good. Although the meat loses its quality, it is safe to eat.

Chickens that are frozen slowly often have darker meat around the bones. But it is still safe to eat.

### Storage Periods

The recommended storage periods for home-frozen meats held at 0 degrees F are given below. For best quality, use the shorter storage time.

Product	Storage Period (months)
<b>Beef:</b>	
Ground Meat	2 to 3
Roasts	8 to 12
Steaks	8 to 12
Stew Meat	2 to 3
<b>Lamb:</b>	
Chops	3 to 4
Ground Meat	2 to 3
Roasts	8 to 12
Stew Meat	2 to 3
<b>Pork, cured: (1)</b>	
Bacon	less than 1
Ham	1 to 2
<b>Pork, fresh:</b>	
Chops	3 to 4
Roasts	4 to 8
Sausage	1 to 2
<b>Veal:</b>	
Cutlets, Chops	3 to 4
Ground Meat	2 to 3
Roasts	4 to 8
Organ Meats	3 to 4

(1) Frozen cured meat loses quality quickly and should be used as soon as possible.

### Storage Periods

	Months
<b>Uncooked Poultry:</b>	
Chicken and Turkey, whole	12
Chicken, cut up	9
Turkey, cut up	6
Duck and Goose, whole	6
Giblets	3
<b>Cooked Poultry:</b>	
Slices or pieces, covered with broth or gravy	6
Slices or pieces, not covered with broth or gravy	1
Cooked Poultry Dishes	2 to 6
Fried Chicken	4

## Thawing

Frozen meat and poultry can be cooked without thawing. Extra cooking time is needed. The extra time will depend on the size and shape of the cut. Large roasts will need to cook about 1½ times as long as fresh meat. Steaks, chops and patties will need some extra time for defrosting while cooking.

Meat and poultry may be thawed in the refrigerator (see chart), in a cool room or in cold water. The best way is to take the package out of the freezer the night before using it. Leave it in its wrapping; place it on a tray and put in the refrigerator for the time listed in the chart. Thawing at room temperature is more likely to result in food spoilage and in a poorer quality product.

For best quality, high nutritional value and food safety do not put unwrapped frozen meat in water to defrost. Instead, plan ahead by putting only the amount of meat to be used at one meal in a package and allowing time for proper thawing or extra time for cooking.

### Thawing Whole Birds in the Refrigerator

<b>Chickens:</b>	
4 pounds and over	1 to 1½ days
Less than 4 pounds	12 to 16 hours
<b>Ducks:</b>	
3 to 7 pounds	1 to 1½ days
<b>Geese:</b>	
6 to 12 pounds	1 to 2 days
<b>Turkeys:</b>	
4 to 12 pounds	1 to 2 days
12 to 20 pounds	2 to 3 days
20 to 24 pounds	3 to 4 days
Pieces of large turkey (half, quarter, half breast)	1 to 2 days
Cut-up pieces	3 to 9 hours
Boneless roasts	12 to 18 hours