

Knowing your fridge

Fridge Temperature

Did you know that you should keep your fridge set to 5 degrees Celsius or below? According to recent research, most Australians don't know that cold food should be stored below this temperature. Yet this simple step can considerably reduce the chances of you or your family getting food poisoning.

Controlling fridge temperature

If possible keep a fridge thermometer in the fridge to make sure the temperature stays around 4-5 degrees Celsius. Many fridges only have temperature settings of 'high' or 'low' or a series of numbers without showing the actual temperature.

You do get some clues when your fridge is having trouble coping. If the motor stays on most of the time, or if your milk, cottage cheese, meat (particularly mince meat) or other perishables are going off quicker than they should, then this is a sign that your fridge is struggling and needs maintenance and/or adjustment. To check if your fridge is operating at the correct temperature you need a thermometer in the fridge. When you have one you might get some surprises. The temperature inside your fridge will vary several degrees as the fridge goes through its cycle. It will also vary markedly from one section to another. If the temperature drops too low, you can get undesirable freezing.

Remember that in summer conditions you may have to adjust your fridge to cope with the extra warm conditions.

Where should you place your fridge thermometer?

Temperatures will vary throughout your fridge and with the type of fridge you have. The door is usually the warmest part and the top shelf is often the warmest shelf (this can vary with the make of your fridge - check the manual for particular details of your model). We suggest you place your thermometer below the top shelf and towards the door to give a general indication of the fridge temperature. If it shows your fridge is higher than five degrees, adjust the fridge setting to lower the temperature. The crispers for fruit and vegetables will usually be slightly warmer so that the fruit and vegetables don't freeze. To avoid accidentally freezing your lettuce, it's best to keep it in the crisper. You might have to adjust the fridge a few times to get it right. Ideally, you want the main compartment to spend most of its time around 4-5 degrees Celsius.

food safety



Storing food in the fridge

- All perishable and cooked food needs to be stored in the fridge. This will not only prevent the growth of food poisoning bacteria, but it will reduce spoilage.
- Always store ready to eat food (that is food that is eaten raw or will not receive any further cooking) above raw food. Store raw meats, fish and poultry where it is coldest. In many fridges this is the bottom shelf. Wherever you store raw meats and poultry, make sure that juices don't drip onto other foods. These juices might contain food poisoning bacteria which can contaminate other food if they drip onto it. If you have to store raw meats or poultry on higher shelves, put them in leak-proof, covered containers.
- Avoid raw and cooked foods touching and keep them separated in the fridge.
- Cover any cooked or ready-to-eat foods stored in the fridge to reduce the risk of cross contamination.
- Don't overcrowd food in your fridge. This can easily happen at Christmas or when you are having a party. To cool food and keep it cool the air must be able to circulate around the food. Remove any foods such as drinks which don't have to be in the fridge and keep them cool in an ice filled cooler or basin.
- Use shallow containers to cool food faster. Cool food on the bench only until steam stops rising. Then place the hot food directly into the container, cover with a lid and put it in the fridge.

Freezing food

- Avoid freezing large amounts of food at a time - it's better to split it into smaller quantities in separate containers. This is also easier for you because you can then defrost only the quantity you need.
- When freezing food you've just bought, place it in freezer bags to maintain quality. You don't need to unwrap prepackaged raw meat on trays, just pop the lot in a bag. This will help minimise cross contamination in your kitchen. Tie the bag after squeezing out as much air as possible, label and date.
- If you are freezing cooked food or leftovers, the most important thing is to cool it quickly. Cool food on the bench only until it stops steaming. Then place the hot food directly into the container, cover with a lid and put it in the freezer.

Thawing frozen food

- Thaw poultry, rolled or seasoned (stuffed) meat joints and boned meat joints right to the centre before cooking.
- Thaw cooked or ready-to-eat foods in the fridge or microwave - not on the bench-top.
- Follow thawing and cooking instructions on packaged frozen food.

And for safety's sake remember the 6 key tips.....

- Keep hot food steaming hot
- Keep cold food refrigerated
- Cook food properly
- Separate raw and cooked foods
- Keep kitchen and utensils clean
- Wash hands with soap and dry thoroughly