

## Glad Protection Pointers

# How Long Do Leftovers Last in the Fridge and Freezer?

Have a surplus of tasty leftovers that you want to save for later? Storing food in the fridge or freezer can extend the life of your leftovers – and it only takes a few simple steps to store food. Read Glad’s guide to learn how long leftovers last and how to properly store food long-term.



## How Long You Should Store Leftovers in the Fridge

If you’re planning to polish off your leftovers in the near future, you can store them in the fridge. Leftovers in the fridge can be eaten anytime within 3-4 days, as long as they were properly cooked and stored.



When cooking and storing leftovers, you should always follow the 4 steps to food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

- Clean: Wash your hands, utensils, and surfaces often while cooking.
- Separate: Avoid cross-contamination by using separate cutting boards, plates/bowls, and utensils for cooked meat, raw meat, and produce.
- Cook: Use a food thermometer to ensure food is cooked to the proper temperature – and once hot food is cooked, make sure it stays above 140° F to prevent bacteria growth.
- Chill: Refrigerate perishable foods within 2 hours; if perishable food has been exposed to temperatures above 90° F, refrigerate within 1 hour. Your refrigerator should be set to 40° F or below to prevent bacteria growth.

### **Storing Leftovers in the Fridge**

How long leftovers last in the fridge depends on how you store them. Luckily, properly storing leftovers in the fridge only requires a few simple steps.

First, make sure food is in small portions before storing leftovers. This will allow the food to cool more rapidly once in the fridge, and ensures all of the leftovers reach the safe refrigerator-storage temperature of 40° F before bacteria can begin growing.

Next, make sure your leftovers are wrapped well before they go in the fridge. Tightly wrap each leftover portion in Glad® Press'n Seal, then place into a storage container or an airtight bag such as Glad® Flex'n Seal Food Storage Quart Bags. Be sure to squeeze any air out of the bag before sealing. Following this method when storing food will help your leftovers retain moisture, prevent bacteria from growing, and keep leftovers from picking up odors from other foods in the fridge.



When reheating your leftovers from the fridge, make sure food reaches an internal temperature of 165° F or above.

### **How Long Can Leftovers Last in the Freezer?**

Freezing leftovers is a great way to extend the life of your food. But you might be wondering: how long can leftovers last in the freezer without losing quality? To maintain the quality of your food, the longest you should keep frozen leftovers is 3-4 months.

Pro tip: Before freezing leftovers for storage, be sure to note the date when the food was prepared so you can properly label your leftovers and remind yourself when they need to be used by.



## Freezing Leftovers for Long-Term Storage

The process for freezing leftovers is pretty similar to the process for refrigerating them. The only difference between freezing leftovers and storing leftovers in the fridge is that you may want to use products specifically designed to help protect your leftovers against freezer burn when storing food long-term.

First, tightly wrap each portion of your leftovers in Glad® FreezerWrap, then place into a storage container or an airtight food storage bag such as Glad® Flex'n Seal Freezer Quart Bags. Again, make sure to squeeze any air out of the bag before sealing. Label the bag with the date the leftovers were prepared. Finally, place the bag in the deepest part of your freezer for storage.

When you're ready to chow down on your frozen leftovers, be sure to properly thaw them first. The best way to thaw frozen leftovers is by moving them into the refrigerator on a plate and letting them thaw gradually.

In a hurry? If you need to thaw leftovers more quickly, ensure they are in an airtight bag – like Glad® Flex'n Seal bags – then submerge it in cold tap water, changing the water every 30 minutes so it continues to thaw. Alternatively, you can thaw frozen leftovers in the microwave by continuing to heat food until it reaches 165° F. After thawing, leftovers should be used within 3 to 4 days or can be refrozen as long as they were reheated to 165° F before being refrozen.

You can view other food storing tips by checking out more of Glad's food protection pointers articles. Want to learn more about how to store meat and meat leftovers in particular? Get meat storing tips with Glad's guide to how long meat can last in the fridge or freezer.