



## Is That Safe To Eat?

A guide to the funky foods in you kitchen.....Consumer Reports 2006

**Q. I went spelunking in my freezer and unearthed a burger patty from 2004. Should I toss it?** In a freezer set at 0 degrees F (check using a refrigerator thermometer), frozen foods remain safe indefinitely. How long taste and texture stay OK depends on the meat. Frozen bacon and sausage retain their quality for a month or two; uncooked burgers, 3 to 4 months; uncooked steaks and roasts, 4 months to 1 year. Date food labels with an indelible marker as they go into the freezer.

**Q. How long do refrigerated eggs last?** Federally graded fresh eggs in their shells are safe for 3 to 5 weeks after the expiration date on the carton; raw yolks and whites, for 2 - 4 days; hard cooked eggs for 1 week. Try to keep the refrigerator temperature lower than 38 degrees F.

**Q. Can I refreeze chilli that was destined to be dinner, but was canceled?** Yes, it's safe to freeze previously cooked or uncooked foods that have thawed properly (in a refrigerator or microwave), although there may be a loss of quality because of moisture lost through defrosting.

**Q. My refrigerated ground meat is gray. Will I turn green if I eat it?** A change in color does not necessarily mean the product is spoiled or will make you sick. Spoiled meat is likely to have an odor or be sticky or slimy.

**Q. I left pizza on the counter overnight. Can I eat it?** NO! Perishable food, including any leftovers, should NEVER be left out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. This is true even if there are no meat products on the pizza. Bacteria that might be present on foods grow fastest at temperatures between 40 degrees and 140 degrees F and can double in numbers every 20 minutes. Use cooked refrigerated leftovers within 4 days.

**Q. I repeatedly refill a plastic spring-water bottle with tap water. Is this a good idea?** Probably not. It may be OK to reuse a bottle a few times, but hand wash it with hot soapy water between uses, or bacteria could grow. (Don't use a dishwasher: its super-hot water could affect the plastic, and narrow bottlenecks might not let in enough water.)

**Q. If I cut those tiny bits of mold off the cheddar cheese, will it be OK?** Maybe not, because spoilage (and sometimes toxins) could go beyond the visible mold. The U.S. Dept of Agriculture says that if you cut off at least 1 inch around and below the mold spot, hard cheeses can still be safely consumed. (Intentional mold, such as that found on Stilton is safe because it has purposely been introduced during the cheese-making process and is 'good' mold.)

**Q. How long can I keep herbs and spices?** Ground spices can be kept for 2 or 3 years. Air, light, moisture and heat are enemies, so store spices and herbs tightly sealed in a cool, dry place. Red spices retain their color better and are best protected from insects if refrigerated. If you don't use an item often, buy it in small amounts.

**Q. If a can of food has no expiration date is it safe to eat?** You can store high-acid foods such as peaches and tomatoes for up to 18 months; low-acid foods such as meat and vegetables for 2 to 5 years. Never put cans above the stove, under the sink, in a damp room or where they can be exposed to temperature extremes. And never use food from leaking, bulging, rusting or badly dented cans as they can harbor a bacteria that produces a deadly toxin.

**Q. How effective is the 'sniff' test?** Food that doesn't smell bad can still make you sick and food that smells bad might not make you sick. Whatever you do, don't taste food to see whether it's spoiled. When in doubt, throw it out. For more info about food storage go to [www.consumerreports.com](#) or

