

KNOW YOUR FRIDGE



Controlling fridge temperature

Many fridges only have temperature settings of 'high' or 'low' or a series of numbers without showing the actual temperature. Your fridge should operate at a temperature that keeps food at or below 5°C.

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.

A good practice is to keep a bottle or glass of water in the warmest section of the fridge (fridges vary from model to model, but usually the door and the top shelf are the warmest places) and label it 'test water—do not drink' (change the water every week). Insert a probe thermometer into the test water and this will give an accurate core temperature of the stored food.

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.

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

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. To cool food and keep it cool the air must be able to circulate around the food. Remove any items such as drinks which don't have to be kept refrigerated.

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Council's Environmental Health Officers can be contacted between the hours of 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday.



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- 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 defrosting only the quantity you need.
- When freezing food you've just bought, place it in freezer bags to maintain quality. This will help minimise cross contamination in your kitchen. Tie the bag after squeezing out as much air as possible, then label and date the bag.
- You don't need to unwrap pre-packaged raw meat on trays, just pop the lot in a bag.
- 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, label and date it 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. in the fridge or microwave.
- 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 warm water and dry thoroughly.

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