

Sandra R. Kelly
For Better Living
Increase the Shelf Life of Your Food- Check Your Refrigerator

Everyone knows that if you leave food in your refrigerator too long, it will spoil. By using proper storage techniques, you can increase the shelf life and the safety of your food.

Have you ever seen mold on fruits, vegetables, or leftovers? Have you deli meats or vegetables ever felt slimy? If so, then you've seen the typical signs of spoilage. Spoilage of foods in the refrigerator are commonly caused by microorganisms such as bacteria, yeast or mold that are naturally present in the food that contaminate the food through improper refrigeration.

The first step to extending the shelf life of refrigerated foods and keeping them safe is to keep food cold. Many people keep their refrigerators too warm, above 40 degrees Fahrenheit. IF you lower the temperature of your refrigerator to between 34 - 38 degrees, you will increase the time it takes for your food to spoil. Colder temperatures slow the growth of microorganisms, therefore taking the food longer to spoil. Turning down the temperature of your refrigerator is as simple as adjusting the control knob inside your refrigerator. Check your owner's manual for correct operation.

It is also important to monitor the temperature of your refrigerator as some models fluctuate greatly. After adjusting the control, check to be sure you refrigerator stays between 34 and 38 degrees. Put a thermometer inside the refrigerator near the door to keep track of the temperature. You can find a refrigerator thermometer for about \$5.00 at grocery stores and discount stores.

Tips for refrigerated storage

- Use plastic bags or aluminum foil around packages or place the entire package in a plastic produce bag to prevent dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate all products whose labels say "keep refrigerated" or "refrigerate after opening"
- Store meat and poultry in the back of the refrigerator rather than in the door because the back is colder.
- Store uncut, whole produce in the crisper where it is more humid.
- Keep the refrigerator sanitized. Clean the inside and outside surfaces with soapy water. Rinse and then wipe surfaces with a solution of one tablespoon unscented bleach per gallon of warm water. This will remove mold spores.
- Date all products to be used within a safe time.

Source: North Carolina Cooperative Extension
North Carolina State University

Green Pepper Tomato Salad

3 medium tomatoes, seeded and chopped
1 medium green pepper, chopped
1 celery rib, thinly sliced
½ cup chopped red onion

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1 tablespoon sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper

In a large bowl, combine the tomatoes, green pepper, celery and onion. In a small bowl, combine the vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper. Stir into the tomato mixture. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours, stirring several times. Serve with a slotted spoon. Yield: 6 servings