

# Thawing Foods Safely

Author: Joyce McGarry, MSU Extension Food Safety Educator  
2022 revision by Laurie Messing, MSU Extension Food Safety Educator

You can thaw frozen foods safely in three ways: refrigerator thawing, cold water thawing and microwave thawing.

In the process of thawing, never keep food in the “Danger Zone,” between 40 °F and 140 °F.

Bacteria can grow quickly in these temperatures. Never thaw foods in the basement, in the car, on the kitchen counter or any place other than in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave.

## Thawing frozen food in the refrigerator

When thawing frozen food in the refrigerator, plan ahead and remember these facts:

- Large frozen meat or poultry requires at least 24 hours to thaw for every 5 pounds of weight.
- Certain areas in the refrigerator may keep food colder than other areas.
- Food will take longer to thaw in a refrigerator set at 35 °F than one set at 40 °F.
- Ground meat, stew meat, poultry and seafood should remain safe for an additional day or two before cooking.
- Red meat cuts will remain safe for an additional 3 to 5 days.
- Food thawed in the refrigerator can be refrozen without cooking but there may be some loss of quality.



## Thawing frozen food in cold water

When thawing frozen food using the cold-water thawing method, a faster method than refrigerator thawing, follow these steps:

- Place food in a leak-proof package or plastic bag.
- Submerge the package or bag in cold tap water.
- Change the water every 30 minutes.
- If you use this method, you should cook the food before refreezing.

Small packages of meat, poultry or seafood may thaw in an hour or less. However, a package of 3 to 4 pounds of food may take 2 to 3 hours.

## Thawing frozen food in the microwave

- Food should be cooked immediately after this thawing method.
- Foods thawed in the microwave should be cooked before refreezing.

## Cooking without thawing

It is safe to cook foods while still frozen; however, cooking time will be 50 percent longer than the recommended time for fully thawed or fresh meat and poultry.

# Thawing Foods Safely

## Reference

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2013, June). *The Big Thaw - Safe Defrosting Methods*. Washington, DC.

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/big-thaw-safe-defrosting-methods>

---

Find out more about Michigan Food Safety at

[www.msue.msu.edu/safefood](http://www.msue.msu.edu/safefood).

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY | **Extension**

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Quentin Tyler, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.

1P-1R-04:2022-Web-PA/BH WCAG 2.0