

PENNY SAVER NEWS

pennysavernews@aol.com

FAX: 932-5261

Oct 4, 2012

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

Don't Waste that Food

For years the word on the street has been that if food has been frozen it can never be frozen again. But please, don't waste that food! If food has been thawed *safely* it CAN be frozen again. And foods that were frozen, then thawed and cooked, can be frozen again too. In fact, that's the recommended way of handling foods that start to thaw during a power outage or storm. Read on for the real facts.

The safest way, and the recommended way to thaw any frozen food is in the refrigerator. Yes, it will take longer in the cold. But that cold is what will keep any bacteria that might be in or on the food from growing. The center of a roast may be rock hard, but the surface could be warm enough to allow germs to grow if it is sitting on the counter. Keeping it cold outside keeps it safe.

Alternative ways of thawing foods include using the microwave. That certainly speeds up the process. But since microwaves do not heat foods evenly, and because they heat inside rather than from the surface, there can be problems. If you use the microwave to thaw raw foods be sure to either turn the food several times or use a turntable. That helps keep it thawing evenly in all parts. The other safety recommendation is that if you thaw a raw food in the microwave you must cook it immediately. Do not put it back in the refrigerator to cook later. A warm spot on one corner could be a cozy nest for a bunch of bacteria to grow. It can be cooked immediately in the microwave, in a regular oven or on the stovetop. The important thing

is just don't wait, cook it right away.

If you are thawing and reheating a cooked dish, be sure to check the temperature in several spots until they reach 165°F. Tent the dish with foil or plastic wrap and allow it to sit for 5 minutes so that the warm and cool spots even out. Then go ahead and serve it. If you use plastic wrap it's a good idea to either have the food in a deep enough dish, or put toothpicks in the food to hold the wrap up off the food while it is hot.

The third safe way to thaw food is under cool running water. The water has to be in motion. Don't let that big frozen turkey sit in still water. Any bacteria in the water might find a spot that is just warm enough to let them start to grow. As long as you keep the water moving they just keep getting washed away.

If you have thawed foods by any of these safe methods, then you can safely freeze it again. There's been no chance of bacteria growing, so it's still safe. What you might lose though is quality. If meat has been frozen, thawed and frozen again it will probably lose some of its juices. It might be tougher or drier when you cook it.

So a better idea, to keep the quality as well as the safety of the food, would be to go ahead and cook it now, then freeze the cooked dish. This is also perfectly safe. But now your problem is how to cool it quickly enough before you put it in the freezer! You do know to not stick a boiling hot pot of stew in the freezer. That would thaw other food. So you need to put the hot pot in a sink of ice water to chill it. Or divide it into several shallow pans and put them in ice water. Of, if there's not a lot of food, you can put small containers of hot food directly into the refrigerator to chill. Once they're cool, then transfer them to the freezer for long-term storage. But the faster you get the food cool the safer it will be. Bacteria grow well between 40°F and 140°F, so the less time food

spends at room temperature the less chance they have to grow. That means you and your family will be safer.

Here's an easy chicken dish to prepare in advance then freeze. When you're ready to serve it thaw it overnight in the refrigerator, then bake and serve it hot. Use the flavor of spaghetti sauce your family prefers.

Cheesy, Saucy Chicken

1 cup reduced fat Italian salad dressing ½ tsp olive oil
2 lbs boneless skinless chicken breast halves 1 26-oz jar spaghetti sauce
8 oz (2 cups) shredded mozzarella cheese Hot cooked rice, spaghetti or macaroni

Put salad dressing and chicken pieces in large zipper-seal plastic bag and marinate in the refrigerator at least half an hour, or overnight. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray 9x13 inch baking dish with pan spray. Heat oil in skillet. Add chicken to skillet, discard dressing. Cook chicken until browned on each side, about 1 minute. Pour about half a cup of spaghetti sauce into baking dish and swirl to cover bottom. Arrange chicken pieces on sauce. Cover with rest of spaghetti sauce, then sprinkle cheese over top. Bake uncovered for 25 minutes until bubbly. Serves 8.