

# Let's Play ... FOOD: Keep or Toss?



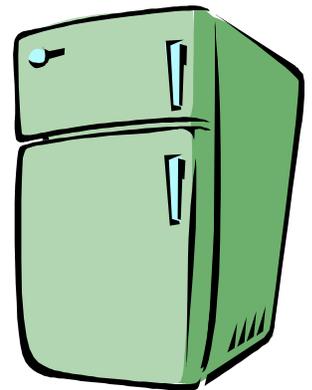
*Alice Henneman, MS, RD, UNL Extension in Lancaster County*  
*Joyce Jensen, REHS, CP-FS, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department*

**Should you “Keep” or “Toss” the following foods? Circle the correct answer.**

1. Tacos left on the kitchen counter overnight? KEEP TOSS
2. Meat thawed all day on the kitchen counter? KEEP TOSS
3. Cut or peeled fruits and vegetables left at room temperature MORE than 2 hours? KEEP TOSS
4. Leftover pizza placed in the refrigerator within 2 hours after it was cooked? KEEP TOSS
5. Leftovers kept in the refrigerator for over a week? KEEP TOSS

## ANSWERS:

1. **TOSS.** Even if you reheat tacos left out overnight, some bacteria can form a heat-resistant toxin that cooking won't destroy. **Refrigerate perishable foods within 2 hours!**
2. **TOSS.** As with the tacos, bacteria may have formed a heat-resistant toxin when the meat was left on the kitchen counter.  
The best place to thaw frozen perishable foods — like frozen meat, poultry, seafood, vegetables, fruit and cooked pasta and rice — is in the refrigerator! Make sure your refrigerator is 40°F or lower.  
Thaw packages of meat, poultry and seafood on a plate on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator. This prevents their juices from dripping on other foods.  
When thawing perishable food in the microwave, cook it immediately after thawing. Some areas of the food may start to cook during microwave thawing and become warm. Any bacteria present would not have been destroyed and may reach optimal temperatures for growth.



**Know how. Know now.**

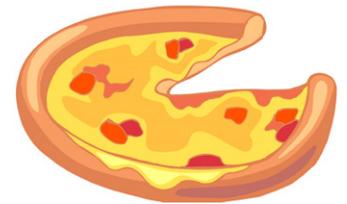
3. **TOSS.** When fruit is peeled or cut, bacteria on the outside can be transferred to the inside. Refrigerate cut/peeled fruits, veggies & other perishable foods within 2 hours! Just 1 bacteria in foods can grow to 2,097,152 bacteria in 7 hours!

### Cleaning Fruits and Veggies

1. Remove and discard outer leaves.
2. Rinse under clean, running water just before preparing or eating.  
Don't use soap or detergent as it can get into produce and make you sick.  
Rinse fruits with peels — even when the peel is removed — such as melons and citrus fruits!
3. Rub briskly — scrubbing with a clean brush or hands — to clean the surface.
4. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel. Moisture left on fruits and vegetables helps bacteria grow. Dry them if you won't eat or cook them right away.
5. Cut away bruised and damaged areas.



4. **KEEP.** If perishable foods have been at room temperature less than 2 hours (1 hour in temperatures above 90°F), they should be safe. Refrigerate promptly; eat within 3 to 4 days.



5. **TOSS.** Even refrigerated leftovers may become unsafe within 3 to 4 days. You can't always see or smell or taste if a food is unsafe. You could get sick tasting a food!



**Remember: When in doubt ... TOSS IT OUT!!!**

#### Resources:

Alabama Cooperative Extension System. The Food Spoilers: Bacteria and Viruses. <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0654>. Accessed June 15, 2010.

USDA. Safe Food Handling -- How Temperatures Affect Food. [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/how\\_temperatures\\_affect\\_food/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/how_temperatures_affect_food/index.asp) (Accessed June 15, 2010).

USDA. Safe Food Handling: The Big Thaw – Safe Defrosting Methods for Consumers. [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/big\\_thaw/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/big_thaw/index.asp) (Accessed June 15, 2010).

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Produce Safety – Safe Handling of Raw Produce and Fresh-Squeezed Fruit and Vegetable Juices. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm114299> (Accessed June 15, 2010).

Source of images: Microsoft Image and Media Library

Contact for Publication: Alice Henneman at [ahenneman1@unl.edu](mailto:ahenneman1@unl.edu)

Updated 6/2010 • This publication has been peer reviewed.