Utah State University
DigitalCommons@USU

All Archived Publications | Archived USU Extension Publications

1-1-2002

Is It Safe To Defrost Meat On The Counter?

Charlotte Brennand

Warning: The information in this series may be obsolete. It is presented here for historical purposes only. For the most up to date information please visit The Utah State University Cooperative Extension Office

Recommended Citation
Brennand, Charlotte, "Is It Safe To Defrost Meat On The Counter?" (2002). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 352.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/352

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archived USU Extension Publications at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Archived Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact becky.thoms@usu.edu.

Utah State University Extension
electronic publishing

ask A Specialist

A weekly question/answer column

Is It Safe To Defrost Meat On The Counter?

Charlotte Brennand answers:*

The general rule in handling perishable food products is to NOT keep food between temperatures of 40 to 140 degrees F for more than two hours. Never thaw food at room temperature. It is easy to forget the food and the outside of the product may become too warm. Thaw food products in the refrigerator, under running cool water, or use a microwave.

- **Refrigerator thawing:** Thawing in the refrigerator is considered the best method, but it requires starting the thawing process a day or two before the product is to be used. Meat, poultry and fish should be placed in a pan to catch drips during the thawing process.
- **Microwave thawing:** If food is thawed in the microwave, it should be cooked immediately. The microwave rays thaw and heat the interior portion of the food product. If the product is returned to the refrigerator, the interior portion may be warm and not cool rapidly enough. Large meat products (for example a whole chicken) may thaw more rapidly in water than in the microwave.
- **Thawing in water:** Products in water-proof wrapping or containers can be thawed by allowing cool (not hot) water to run over them. Place the product in a bowl in the sink and let the tap run slowly, filling and overflowing the bowl. Do not use this method for longer than 2 hours. *Meat can be cooked starting with a frozen or partially frozen product. It will take longer to cook than a nonfrozen product.
- Any spilled meat juices from thawing need to be cleaned up. Simply wiping the counter or refrigerator shelf isn't enough since this may merely spread bacteria over the surface. It is scary to realize that salmonella can live on a dry counter top for 14 to 17 days. Wash counters, cutting boards and equipment with warm soapy water. Extra security is provided by spraying counters with a chlorine solution or any kitchen disinfectant.
- It is no longer recommended that chicken and other poultry be washed prior to cooking. There are two reasons behind the change. First, any contamination on the bird is on the inside or outside surface and these are the areas that will be heated most thoroughly, therefore killing pathogens such as salmonella. Second, when washing the bird, any contamination on the bird can be spread to other surfaces. So it is more of a risk to wash poultry than to not wash it.

WHAT CAN I USE IF MY FREEZER STOPS AND EVERYTHING THAWS?

Partially frozen food can be refrozen. Generally, refreezing should not pose a hazard if the food is not warmer than 40 degrees F. If thawed food still has ice crystals, it is safe to refreeze, but there may be some loss of quality. If it doesn't have ice crystals, it is helpful to put a

thermometer in the freezer and check the freezer temperature. Food at 40 degrees F or less is still safe.

- **Meat, poultry and vegetables:** Refreeze if the temperature is 40 degrees F or colder and the color and odor are good. Discard packages that show signs of spoilage, such as off-color or bad odors.
- **Fruits:** Refreeze if they smell and taste good. Thawed fruits can also be used in cooking or making jellies, jams or fruit leather. Frozen concentrated juices can be refrozen if they are still cold and don't show signs of leakage.
- **Cooked foods:** Refreeze if ice crystals are present or temperature is 40 degrees F or less. If the condition is poor or questionable, throw it out.
- **Nuts, breads, plain cakes and cookies:** These can be refrozen regardless of temperature. Cakes and breads may be drier after refreezing.
- **Creamed foods, puddings and items that have a cream filling such as eclairs or Boston cream cake:** Don't refreeze. If the temperature is below 40 degrees F, keep refrigerated and use them in the next day or two.
- **Ice cream:** Toss it or use it as part of the liquid in making muffins.
- The quality of foods that are refrozen is affected. Therefore, label these foods and use them quickly.

---

* Charlotte Brennand is Utah State University Extension Food Safety Specialist