

STORING & DEFROSTING PORK - FAQs

How long can I keep my fresh pork in the refrigerator?

Sealed, prepacked fresh pork cuts can be kept in the refrigerator 2-4 days; sealed ground pork will keep in the refrigerator for 1-2 days. If you do plan on keeping the raw, fresh pork longer than 2-3 days before cooking it, store it well-wrapped in the freezer.

What length of time can I keep pork in the freezer?

Generally, fresh cuts of pork, like roasts, chops and tenderloin can be kept well-wrapped in the freezer up to 6 months. Well-wrapped ground pork can be kept for about 3 months in the freezer.

How do I properly wrap my fresh pork to keep it in the freezer?

Follow these steps to help keep your pork fresh in the freezer

- Use one of these freezer wrap materials: specially-coated freezer paper (place the waxed side against the meat); heavy-duty aluminum foil; heavy-duty polyethylene film; heavy-duty plastic bags.
- Re-wrap pork in convenient portions: leave roasts whole, place chops in meal-size packages, shape ground pork into patties. Put a double layer of waxed paper between chops and patties.
- Cover sharp bones with extra paper so the bones do not pierce the wrapping.
- Wrap the meat tightly, pressing as much air out of the package as possible.
- Label with the name of the pork cut and date.
- Freeze at 0 degrees F or lower.

How long can I store ham or other smoked products in the refrigerator?

Whole smoked ham and whole ham slices can be stored in the refrigerator for 3-4 days or the use by date on

the label. Smoked sausages, hot dogs, bacon and other luncheon meats can be kept for up to 7 days.

What about freezing ham?

The National Pork Board does not encourage freezing cooked ham, since it affects the quality and mouth-feel of the meat. However, leftover ham for use in soups or casseroles can be cut up into slices or cubed and stored in the freezer for 2-3 months.

I have leftovers from a big roast, how long can I keep them?

Leftovers should be placed in the refrigerator within 1-2 hours of serving. Store cooked leftovers in the coldest part of the refrigerator for 4-5 days. Well-wrapped leftovers can be kept in the freezer for up to 3 months.

Can I brown my fresh pork this morning, put it the refrigerator and finish cooking it tonight?

Never brown or partially cook any meat.

Is it safe to eat leftover food that was left out on the counter to cool at dinnertime, then forgotten until morning?

No. Bacteria grow most rapidly in the range of temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees F, some doubling in number in as little as 20 minutes. Some types will produce toxins that are not destroyed by cooking.

Pathogenic bacteria do not generally affect the taste, smell, or appearance of a food. In other words, one cannot tell that a food has been mishandled or is dangerous to eat. If a food has been left in the "Danger Zone" — between 40 and 140 degrees F — for more than 2 hours, discard it, even though it may look and smell good. Never taste a food to see if it is spoiled. It is always best to use the rule of "When in doubt, throw it out."

What is the best way to thaw frozen pork?

The best way to defrost pork is in the refrigerator in its original wrapping.

Follow these guidelines for defrosting pork in the refrigerator:

- Small roast will take 3-5 hours per pound.
- Large roast will take 4-7 hours per pound.
- Chop, 1" inch thick will take 12-14 hours.
- Ground pork needs to be estimated by package thickness.

Can I use my microwave to defrost pork?

Follow the microwave manufacture's guidelines for defrosting meat. Cook meat immediately after microwave thawing.

My roast isn't thawed completely, but I need to get my meal started. Can I still cook it?

It is safe to cook frozen or partially-frozen pork in the oven, on the stove or grill without defrosting it first; the cooking time may be about 50% longer. Use a meat thermometer to check for doneness. It is best if frozen pork roasts are cooked at an oven temperature of 325 degrees F. Do not cook frozen pork in a slow cooker.

Can pork be refrozen if it has thawed?

According to the USDA, once food is thawed in the refrigerator, it is safe to refreeze it without cooking, although there may be a loss of quality due to the moisture lost through defrosting. After cooking raw foods which were previously frozen, it is safe to freeze the cooked foods.

