



Defrosting Foods Safely

Preparing dinner shouldn't be a high-risk activity. Unfortunately, improperly handling of frozen foods can pose a potential health risk to your family and guests.

When thawing frozen foods, it's important to make sure that the internal temperature of the food product never gets into the "danger zone" between 40°F - 140°F. If it does, bacteria that cause foodborne illness can multiply extremely rapidly.

Food should never be thawed at room temperature because the outer surface could easily warm above 40°F while the center remains frozen.

There are three ways to safely defrost foods.

Option I: The "Refrigerator Method"

This method involves placing a wrapped food item in a pan on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator away from other foods. Placing the food in a pan is important to prevent potential cross contamination from drippings as the product thaws.

Thawing by this method can take several hours, so advance planning is necessary. For example, a large turkey can take 3 to 4 days to completely thaw in the refrigerator depending upon its size. Plan on a thawing time of about 4 to 5 hours per pound for most foods.

Option II: The "Cold Water Method"

A second way to safely thaw foods is to place a securely wrapped package of frozen food in a pan of cold water, changing the water approximately every 30 minutes. Continue the process until the food item is thawed.

On average, it will take about 30 minutes per pound to thaw using this method. In addition, this method can only be used if you plan to cook the food item immediately.

Option III: The "Microwave Method"

Frozen foods can also be thawed in a microwave if you plan to cook the food immediately. Check your owner's manual for the minutes per pound and power level to use for thawing various types of foods. Be sure to rotate the food regularly to ensure even thawing.

Any uncooked frozen food items thawed in a microwave must be cooked immediately.

Cooking from a Frozen State

If there isn't time to defrost, most foods can be cooked from the frozen state. If you do cook food that is fully or partially frozen at the start, be sure to extend your cooking time to compensate and use a certified food thermometer to verify that the food has been cooked to a proper internal temperature throughout.

Frozen foods can take up to 50 percent longer to cook than the thawed version of the same food.

For additional food safety tips, contact the NSF Consumer Affairs Office at info@nsf.org or download our [Food Safety fact kit](#).

NSF International is an independent, not-for-profit public health organization that certifies products and writes standards for food, water and consumer goods. NSF has a 65-year history of protecting public health, safety and environment worldwide.