

## Refrigeration Food Safety

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### **Q. What temperature should my refrigerator and freezer be set at?**

**A.** For refrigerators, 40°F (or lower) is recommended to slow bacterial growth and maintain quality. Freezing occurs at 32°F; adjust refrigerator accordingly between 32°F and 40°F to prevent unwanted freezing, such as milk, celery and lettuce.

For freezers, 0°F (or lower) is the recommended temperature. At this temperature, bacterial growth will be stopped. However, freezing does not kill most bacteria, nor does it stop flavor changes that occur over time. Though food will be safe indefinitely at 0°F, quality will decrease the longer the food is in the freezer.

### **Q. Should I purchase a refrigerator/freezer thermometer?**

**A.** Using a refrigerator/freezer thermometer is the only way to assure your refrigerator and freezer are at the correct temperature.

The numbers used to adjust the temperature on most home refrigerators only raise or lower the temperature. They do not match specific temperatures. A different setting may be needed during warmer months than colder months to maintain the same temperature.

Purchase refrigerator/freezer thermometers in the housewares section of department, appliance, culinary and grocery stores. Buy two! Place one in your refrigerator and one in your freezer. It may be the best \$10 to \$20 investment you ever make. Two more tips:

- Place the thermometer in the front of the refrigerator/freezer in an easy-to-read location.
- Check temperature regularly—at least once a week.

If the freezer compartment isn't a separate freezer compartment, but a compartment inside the refrigerator, it may be impossible to obtain a 0°F temperature. One sign of this will be soft ice cream. Plan to use food within a few weeks.

### **Q. How can you tell if your freezer power was off when you were away?**

**A.** Store an ice cube or two in a sealed plastic bag or small container in the freezer; a sealed bag/container is important so the ice cube doesn't evaporate and disappear. IF the ice cub has melted down from its original shape, you'll know the power was off for an extended period of time. *Information from "Food Reflections Newsletter" by Alice Henneman, University of Nebraska Extension.*

Call me at the Webster County Extension Office, 576-2119 or e-mail [pgilbert@iastate.edu](mailto:pgilbert@iastate.edu), with your nutrition and health questions. You may also call our toll-free ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804