

Proper Ways to Thaw Frozen Food

Introduction

Thawing or defrosting foods is a critical control point to prevent food borne illness. During thawing take care to avoid cross contamination and to minimize time in the temperature danger zone (between 41degrees F and 135 degrees F).

Proper Thawing Methods

Thawing foods properly should be done in any of these four ways:

1. In a refrigerator at 41degrees F or colder,
2. Using a microwave,
3. As part of the cooking process, or
4. Under running water.

In a Refrigerator (at 41 degrees F or less)

Thaw food in a refrigerator at 41degrees F or colder. This is one of the safest ways to thaw foods. However, there are a few reminders:

- Be sure to use a drip pan under the food being thawed so that the drippings don't contaminate other foods.
- Thaw raw foods below ready to eat foods so that drippings don't contaminate foods.
- Plan ahead. This process can take longer for the frozen foods to thaw; turkey may take 24 hours or more.

Using a Microwave

Use a microwave to thaw foods that are to be cooked immediately following the thawing process. Microwave thawing actually begins the cooking process and should be followed by completing the cooking of the food item.

Although thawing foods by a microwave is efficient, it is not recommended for large food items.

As Part of the Cooking Process

Frozen foods can also be thawed as part of the cooking process. Foods which work well with this method are frozen vegetables and ground meats.

Allow more time than normal to cook and stir the food more often. Check the final internal food temperature with a thermometer to determine that potentially harmful bacteria have been killed.

Under Running Water

Another way to thaw frozen foods is under cool (recommended 75EF) running water with water pressure sufficient to flush away loose particles.

It is important to limit this method to no more than two (2) hours at a recommended water temperature of 75 degrees F (24 degrees C). A clean and sanitized food sink separate from hand wash sinks is needed. Avoid cross contamination from the water dripping off the food or splashing onto other foods and preparation surfaces and utensils.

For More Information

For more information on food protection, please contact the Environmental Health Division at (530) 621-5300 in Placerville or (530) 573-3450 in South Lake Tahoe.

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