



SUPER FRESH

STORING MEAT
LIKE A PRO

FEARLESS & FRESH

from STEPHANIE STIAVETTI

SUPER FRESH STORING MEAT LIKE A PRO

A big part of being a meat ninja is storing it properly. I know this doesn't sound exciting, but trust me when I tell you that if you don't treat your raw meat well, it will definitely affect the flavor of your finished dish - and you might even make someone very sick. Do I have your attention yet? Good.

Storing raw meat is pretty simple, and involves four basic needs: Keeping it sealed, keeping it separate, keeping it cold, and eating it relatively quickly.

KEEP IT SEALED

Why is it important to keep raw meat sealed tightly?



- ✓ First, your fridge and freezer are climate controlled so that they stay really dry, which can seriously dry out meat and ruin its fresh texture and flavor. Freezer burn is not good eats.
- ✓ Second, these appliances also circulate the same air for hours or days at a time, and this recycled air action causes weird flavors - such as onions and that vague "freezer" taste - to soak into other foods. Cheese, ice cream, and meat are particularly happy to absorb off-flavors, which can seriously ruin your meal.
- ✓ Third, the pathogens in raw meat like to jump ship to other things in the fridge, which is a really easy way to make someone sick. You want to keep meat juices completely contained and not running amok all over your other foods - especially those that will be eaten raw. (Again, your poor ice cream and cheese are at risk!)

So the big rule is this: In order to keep your meat from turning into a rawhide chew toy, picking up the weird flavors floating around your fridge, or contaminating other foods around it with pathogens, you'll need to seal it well.

That means no, you can't just toss the paper-wrapped package from the butcher into the freezer, because it's not airtight. If your meat was sold in a foam tray and sealed with plastic, you can technically freeze that, though it's not ideal because any open space in the package will allow your meat to develop freezer burn. (See rawhide chew toy reference above.)

Sealing meat can be as easy as zipping it up in a freezer-style Ziploc bag, or as hardcore as using a vacuum sealer to prevent your dinner from turning into a cryogenic zombie. A simple layer of plastic wrap isn't going to cut it; If you're using plastic wrap, you need to wrap it at least twice.

No matter how you wrap it, just make sure your raw meat is completely sealed and airtight, and that it's not surrounded by a cushion of air. In other words, squeeze all the air out of the wrap before sealing. This means you can't just plunk a raw, naked steak or chicken breast into a sealed plastic box. It needs to be wrapped in plastic first, or it will dry out and start changing colors.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON WRAPPING MEAT FOR FREEZING:

Think about how you're going to use your raw meat before wrapping and freezing it. If you buy 5 pounds of chicken breasts and freeze them all together, you'll have to defrost the whole huge lump before you can use any of it. And no, you can't just re-freeze what you didn't use or you run the risk of contaminating the meat and/or ruining the texture. (Nice try, though.)

I recommend freezing meat in two-person portions. This allows you to pull out only as much as you need, and if you need more, you can just pull out additional portions. Easy, efficient!

KEEP IT COLD

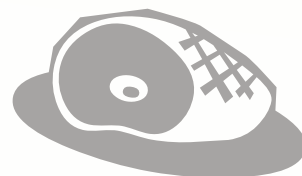


All meat needs to be refrigerated to keep bacteria and other creepies at bay. That includes immortal-type meats such as deli cuts, hot dogs, and canned meats after they've been opened. The one exception to this rule is cured meat, such as salami. Cured meats are preserved with salt and sugar, which inhibits bacterial growth. These items can be kept at room temperature because they've been specially treated to not go bad.

How can you tell if your meat or sausage needs to be chilled? Easy! When you bought it, was it in the refrigerator section of the grocery store or deli? Then it probably needs to go in the fridge at home. When in doubt, ask someone who works where you shop.

KEEP IT SEPARATE: LOW MAN ON THE TOTEM POLE

Always always always store raw meat on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator! This is super important, because meat is often wet and juicy, and those juices can easily leak out of the packaging and drip down... onto any unsuspecting cheese and salad greens that may be hanging out on lower shelves. (Meat juices even find a way to leak out of the most expensive, high-end Ziploc bags.)



When chilling raw meat in the refrigerator, always place it in a bowl or deep dish that will allow any leakage to stay contained, and always be careful when removing the meat to make sure any excess juices don't end up splattered on the floor, counter, or other foods. I like to set a few folded up paper towels in the bowl first, to catch anything that might leak out.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- » If you get raw meat juice on other foods in your fridge, *do not eat them unless they have been cooked to over 165F*. That's the temperature that kills meat-borne pathogens.
- » If you get raw meat juice on bottles, jars, or other sealed items, wipe them down with disinfectant spray.
- » If you get raw meat juice on or in cheese, salad greens, leftovers, sauces, etc, these items will need to be thrown out unless you plan on cooking them to 165F.
- » ***Seriously. Don't mess around with this stuff.***

HOW LONG IS RAW MEAT GOOD FOR IN THE FRIDGE?

You can only keep raw meat in the fridge for a little while before it goes bad - usually 5 days max, if it's been sealed and chilled properly. This is why it's a good idea to either buy meat right before you're going to cook it, or else keep it in the freezer and defrost it the night before you need it. More on safe defrosting later in this guide!

If you're worried that your meat has been in the fridge for too long, take it out of the packaging and inspect it. Is it sticky? Does it smell bad? Is it overly slimy? Then toss it. Better safe than sorry!

» **Note:** Raw chicken can be a tiny bit slimy and have a touch of weird smell, even when it's good. So get to know what good chicken looks and feels like so you can tell the difference. There's an exercise on how to do this coming up.



Color changes are not a good way to tell raw meat has gone bad, because raw meats can lighten and darken due to exposure to air and the aging process, while still being ok to eat. Have you ever been to a butcher and seen how the meat on the top layer of the stack is a slightly different color than the meat underneath? That's what I'm talking about. Meat oxidizes just like other organic matter, so a little color change can be totally normal.

That said, if you've got some funky stuff going on with your meat, color-wise - such as the appearance of unnatural colors, like black, green, or white spots - your meat has gone the way of the zombie and should be laid to rest... In the trash.



In the end, smell is the best bet for telling if meat has turned. If you open the container and you get hit in the face with an overpowering rancid or rotten smell, toss the meat immediately. But what if you're getting a subtly strange smell that isn't necessarily a deal-breaker, and you don't know if it's ok or not? Here's a little exercise to do ahead of time so you know what's what.

EXERCISE: GET TO KNOW YOUR MEAT AHEAD OF TIME

This is why it's important for you to get to know meat in its raw state. Here's a little exercise to familiarize yourself with what good meat should look, feel, and smell like.



- ✓ **Buy some fresh meat**, take it home, and look at it. Note the color, the texture, how shiny it is (or isn't).
- ✓ **Touch it and feel the surface.** Meat should be relatively smooth and moist, but not sticky or slimy.
- ✓ **Smell it.** Raw meat may or may not smell good to you, but it's important to be able to tell the differences between normal smells and bad smells. For example, my chef friend Kirstin once noted that raw chicken smells “farty,” and she's right. It does have a little bit of an ick to it, even when it's fresh from the package. But bad chicken is a whole new level of stank.
- ✓ **Now wrap up that meat** and store it properly, and go wash your hands!

HOW TO FREEZE MEAT

There are fewer things more awesome than finding a great sale on meat, or even splitting whole pig with a few friends. (Organic pork chops for daaaaaaays!) Thankfully all meat freezes really well, as long as it's tightly wrapped and protected from the dry freezer environment.



As I mentioned before, raw meat will both give and take off flavors. So unless you want your ice cream tasting like gamey lamb fat, or your pork chops tasting like, well, freezer, seal your meat like I discussed in the beginning of this guide.

Don't re-freeze meat! Raw meat doesn't mind being frozen, but it does not like being frozen twice. The problem with defrosting and freezing meat multiple times is:

1. It greatly decreases the chances of the meat picking up some icky pathogens while sitting below freezing temperatures, and freezing again won't kill them.
2. It can dry out your meat, or cause it to have a weird, rubbery texture and not-great flavor once cooked.
3. You can easily lose track of how old your meat is, and accidentally eat meat that's been sitting around too long. No bueno!

HOW LONG CAN RAW MEAT SIT IN THE FREEZER?

If the meat is well wrapped and your freezer maintains a good, consistent temperature, raw meat can happily live in the freezer for up to six months. Just remember: The older your meat is, the less fresh it will taste. So I recommend freezing meat no longer than 3 - 4 months if you can help it.



That said. . .I've eaten frozen meat a year later with no ill effect. (Don't judge! I had two whole butchered and packaged lambs in the freezer, and it takes a long time to eat two whole animals.)

HOW TO DEFROST MEAT

Defrosting meat is an art in and of itself, and there are some key things to know if you want to stay safe.



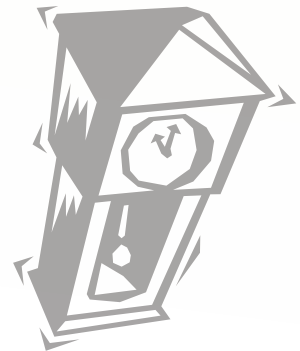
First off: NEVER EVER leave raw meat out on the counter to defrost. If left at room temperature, it takes meat just long enough to thaw that some parts have been too warm for too long, causing some serious risk for pathogen invasion. This is the fast-track to making someone sick.

OPTION #1:

The best way to defrost raw meat is to set it in a large bowl and place it in the refrigerator until it gets soft. This is the safest way to go about it, as your meat will never dip into the danger zone of bacterial badness. Larger cuts of meat will take a few days to defrost fully, so you'll want to plan accordingly.

Here's a quick guide, though timing will depend on how cold your fridge is.

- » Chicken breasts, legs, wings: up to 24 hours
- » Chicken, whole: 2 days
- » Turkey, whole: up to 3 days, depending on the size
- » Fish: overnight
- » Small steak: overnight
- » Thick steaks or chops: 24 hours
- » Roasts: up to 2 days, depending on size



OPTION #2:

If you're in a hurry, there's a quicker way to thaw raw meat. Make sure the meat is well sealed, and set it in a bowl in the sink. Turn your faucet onto the cold setting and let a stream of cool water run over the meat, which will thaw the meat fast enough to keep it from going bad.

Check the meat every 30 minutes to see where it's at in the defrosting process, not letting it sit more than 90 minutes. Once it's at a good degrees of softness, dry the package and set it back in the fridge until you're ready to use it.

The key here is to not walk away for four hours and forget what's going on. Set a timer to make sure you keeping an eye on your meat.

DON'T BE PARANOID!

I know all of this talk of pathogens and slime and bad smells can be unnerving, especially if you're new to this whole meat game. The thing is, there's really no reason to be anxious about cooking meat. People eat meat every day.



By far, those who cook meat and don't get sick outnumber those to do by a huge amount. Cooking meat is actually really safe and easy if you follow the few basic rules I've outlined here, and all of this knowledge soon becomes second nature, so you don't even have to think about it.

You reduce your chance of illness by buying organic, locally-raised, free-range meat. I could write a whole book on this topic (oh wait, [someone already has](#)) but suffice it to say that factory farms and feedlots are filthy, disgusting operations and the meat that comes out of them have infinitely more opportunities to become contaminated.

If you're looking for an easy way to remember all of this, I've created ***The Great Meat Cheat Sheet*** that you can hang on your fridge, to remember the key points! You can print it out and hang it on your fridge. Take a look for it in the ***Free Kitchen Ninja Resource Library***.

DID YOU LOVE THIS GUIDE?

Then [click here to check out the Fearless Fresh Cooking Cheat Sheets](#). They're printed in vivid color, fully laminated, and always at arm's reach when you need them. They're built to last and will make you feel like a total boss in the kitchen.

- Full color double-sided printing 🌈
- 3-hole punched for use in any binder 📅
- Thickly laminated so they're totally indestructible 💪
- Kitchen-proof and 99% waterproof 💧

Fearless Fresh Cooking Cheat Sheets are sold individually or in sets to suit your needs. I craft a new series every season, so **be sure to jump on the mailing list** to find out about our newest sets!

CHECK THESE OUT!

NEED HELP?

Join the **Fearless Fresh Kitchen Ninjas group** on Facebook and get all of your cooking questions answered. There's no drama or stupid blog post spam and we're all really nice. Pinky swear!

FEARLESS🔥FRESH

Get fearless in the kitchen!

COPYRIGHT 2017 - STEPHANIE STIAVETTI, FEARLESS FRESH®. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Fearless Fresh, the Fearless Fresh logo, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of Stephanie Stiavetti in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.