# SAFE FOOD STORAGE

## Important!

**Important requirements for safe food storage:**

- Food must not be stored with chemicals, packaging or waste.
- Food must not be stored on the floor.
- When opened, food ingredients must be covered/decanted, labelled and date-marked.
- Food must be stored at the appropriate temperature. There must not be any evidence of temperature abuse.
- Cross contamination must be avoided i.e. store raw and cooked food separately.
- Expiry dates must be adhered to - First in, First out (FIFO).
- Waste or products to be returned must be clearly demarcated.

### Why are good storage practices so important throughout the store?

Correct food storage is necessary to:

- Protect food items from contamination such as pests and dust.
- Protect food from temperature fluctuations.
- Maximise freshness.
- Preserve the appearance, quality and nutritional value.
- Prevent food spoilage and therefore wastage.

Correct storage of food packaging:

- Store all packaging off the floor to prevent entrance of pests or physical contamination.
- Seal/cover all packaging if stored on shelves to prevent dust settling, but not above preparation areas.
- If opened and stored in a cupboard, store upside down to prevent pests and dust from entering containers.
- Ensure food containers are clean before serving food in them.

We have a responsibility to ensure that whatever we sell to our customers is in the best possible condition. In doing this we will ensure continual support from them.

**The FIFO principle = First In - First Out**
Stock rotation is important to maintain the correct levels of stock needed and to ensure that older stock is used first. All types of food should be rotated. Daily checks should be made on short shelf-life perishable products, whereas weekly checks may suffice on longer self-life products.

Effective stock rotation also assists with pest control – areas are disturbed where rodents and insects might otherwise be harboured. Food handlers and shelf packers should carry out visual checks and clean thoroughly.

Food that is received and stored first, must be used first! Stock rotation is therefore very important. When products are received and decanted, they must be dated and used as soon as possible. If new stock is received and older stock is still usable, the new stock must be stored behind the older stock and clearly marked, so that it is visible to all staff which stock is to be used first.

**Dry ingredients**
Storage areas and containers for dry ingredients must be kept dry, cool and pest proof. All food should be covered to reduce risk of contamination. Adequate lighting is necessary to aid cleaning and the detection of dirt, spillages and pests. There must be an effective ventilation system because temperature fluctuations can lead to condensation which can cause contamination. Dry ingredient storage area must be included on the cleaning schedule.

Foods such as flour, pasta, cereals, jams, pickles, nuts and dried fruit can be stored for longer periods of time. The following rules must be followed:

- Reject/throw out if tins are dented, blown or rusted.
- Store in a clean, dry and well-ventilated area.
- Always store off the floor.
- Do not store food in opened tins, store in plastic containers with lids (preferably clear). Remember to label and date mark.
- When transferring from the original containers, retain the ingredient list and batch code to ensure that correct ingredients and batch codes can be supplied for the final product.
- Date code the container with the decanting date.

**Remember:** Swollen or blown packs can be a sign that bacteria have grown in the product - do not be tempted to pass them on to another department for use!

**Frozen foods**
Frozen food keeps for longer than refrigerated foods, but not indefinitely. If frozen food contains bacteria, the bacteria becomes dormant and, as soon as the temperature is raised, it starts to multiply again, so it is important that if food has thawed it is cooked immediately and not re-frozen.

The temperature of freezers should be at least -23°C. The type of frozen product e.g. ice cream and sorbet (excluding soft serve) core temperature must reach -18°C while all other products must be -12°C. Keep freezers clean and defrost regularly to ensure they work correctly.

Food must be covered to prevent freezer burn occurring through loss of moisture. Already frozen products do not need air to circulate so food can be stored close together. Display freezers must not be loaded above the load line and temperatures for all freezers must be checked twice daily.

All products must be date marked, and FIFO principles applied.

No food product can be kept directly on the freezer floor.

## Refrigerated foods

Refrigeration only delays food spoilage and growth of bacteria and moulds; it does not prevent it. Most common food poisoning organisms multiply more slowly at temperatures below 5°C. Certain pathogens, such as Listeria do grow at temperatures below 5°C.

Raw and high-risk foods must be kept apart; raw foods must be stored below cooked food. All foods must be adequately covered (this will prevent the food from drying out, absorbing odours and cross contamination), dated and labelled.

- Fridges must be set at 5°C or below.
- Do not overstock the fridges. Stack shelves evenly so that the cold air can circulate well.
- Follow the FIFO principle very strictly! Clearly date ingredients and foodstuffs if taken out of their original packaging.
- Store in plastic sealable containers. Do not store food in cardboard boxes as these absorb moisture and harbour bacteria.
- Never store liquids above solids, to avoid any spillages onto the solids below.
- Always defrost raw foods and cooked foods on the bottom shelf (in demarcated sections) to prevent dripping onto other foods.
- Look out for instructions on packaging, as some foods will state “once opened, store in a refrigerator”.
- Food that has been cooked and is not going to be used immediately, should be refrigerated.
- Maintain the cold chain on ready-to-eat desserts, sandwiches and salads until they are ready to be merchandised.
- For most produce, refrigeration is the best way to maintain freshness and quality, but some do not require refrigeration.

**NOTE**

Unwashed produce must be stored away from food which is cooked/ready-to-eat, to avoid contamination from soil and bacteria. Those that do not require refrigeration should be kept in an ambient temperature in a dry stockroom. Once fresh produce has been cut, peeled or chopped, it must be covered and refrigerated immediately, below 5°C, as they become “high risk”.

## Loading the refrigerator

Efficiency is impaired if food is placed in front of the cooling unit. Refrigerators must not be overloaded as good air circulation is necessary to keep a constant temperature.
Hot food should be cooled rapidly before storing. If the food is still warm when it is refrigerated, the temperature inside the refrigerator may rise, increasing the possibility of bacterial multiplication. Condensation may also form and drip onto other food/s with the risk of causing contamination.

## Cooked foods

The food types prepared and served from a hot deli and ready to eat foods are classified as high risk. High risk foods are those foods that are at higher risk of supporting the multiplication of pathogens.

If cooked food is not required for immediate consumption, it must be kept at a temperature of 60°C and above or cooled rapidly and stored in the refrigerator.

If cooked food is cooled, it should reach a temperature of 10°C or below in less than 90 minutes. Food cools more rapidly if cool air can circulate around it. Blast chillers can reduce food temperature from 70°C to 3°C in less than 90 minutes. If you do not have a blast chiller, it is advisable to work with cooked meat joints that have been portioned to weigh less than 2.5kg each. Drain hot liquids and cool in shallow pans at the coolest temperature area in your department.

All prepared hot food that is merchandised hot has a **one day shelf life.**