

Ten top 10 tips to help reduce food waste

1) **Know the difference between 'Use By' and 'Best Before' dates**

'Use By' dates are the most important date to consider, as these relate to food safety. Most foods can be frozen up until the 'Use By' date, but not after.

'Best before' dates are about quality, not safety. When the date is passed, it doesn't mean that the food will be harmful, but it might begin to lose its flavour and texture.

2) **Don't trust the sniff test!**

Food can look and smell fine even after its use-by date, but that doesn't mean it's safe to eat. It could still be contaminated. You cannot see, smell or taste the bugs that cause food poisoning.

3) **How long can I freeze things for and what about the 'Use By' date?**

Foods can be stored safely in a correctly functioning freezer for years without going off.

The freezer is like a pause button, so you can freeze foods right up to the 'Use By' date. Whilst food is kept safe in the freezer, it's the quality that deteriorates over time, so we recommend consumption within three to six months and check for any freezing instructions on the packaging.

Once defrosted, the pause button is off, so it's best to defrost food as required and eat within 24 hours.

4) **When should I freeze food?**

Many people believe food can only be frozen on the day of purchase, however, you can safely freeze most foods right up to the 'Use By' date. Although it would be good to freeze it as soon as you know you aren't going to use it before its 'Use By' date expires.

5) **Did you know that you can safely freeze raw and cooked meats?**

You can cook defrosted meat into a new meal and freeze for use on another day.

Simply defrost overnight in the fridge (be careful that raw meat doesn't drip on any other foods in the fridge and check it is thoroughly defrosted), use within 24 hours and cook till steaming hot.

6) **How long can you freeze meat for?**

Generally you can freeze meat for a long time and it will still be safe to eat, but the quality will deteriorate so it's best to eat it within three to six months. Don't worry if it's frozen for longer - try marinating it before cooking to improve texture or use herbs and spices to add flavour.

7) **Make the most of multi buys**

You can buy large packets of meat (i.e. chicken breasts) and freeze them individually in smaller bags. You can also cook enough for two (or more!) meals and eat one and freeze some for later - this avoids waste and minimises the effort of cooking. Most of what is in people's freezers is either bought frozen food, or food bought fresh and then frozen.

8) **Batching cooking**

Cooking new meals from leftovers and freezing of homemade foods, can be a great way of saving money (and time) and using up foods approaching their 'Use By' date as well as reducing waste.

9) **Wrap up**

It is best to place food in an air tight container or wrap food well in foil, freezer wrap or cling film before placing in the freezer, otherwise the cold air will dry it out. Try to expel any air from freezer bags.

10) **Planning**

Try and get into the habit of checking what you already have in the fridge and freezer before you go shopping. Use up foods that are approaching their 'Use By' date and other fresh foods like fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, cheese or milk first as these can go off over time.