



By: The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

Mealtime is grab-and-go for many people. Take-out food is taking over. Wherever you obtain your take-out food, certain food safety tips apply:

Tip 1: More than two is bad for you

Two hours is the maximum time perishable foods should be kept at room temperature. When not kept under control, bacteria can grow rapidly. If you're serving food in temperatures over 90° F, such as at a picnic, limit the time in which food sits out to one hour or less. Just one bacterium, doubling every 20 minutes, could grow to 64 bacteria in two hours and 2,097,152 bacteria in seven hours!

Don't hesitate – refrigerate at 40°F or colder if you won't be eating your take-out meal within two hours.

Perishable foods include meat, poultry, fish and dairy products, pasta, rice, and cooked vegetables. Also, refrigerate fresh, peeled, and/or cut fruits and vegetables within a couple of hours.

Tip 2: Here's the rule – get it cool

Refrigerate hot take-out foods right away if you won't be eating them within two hours. Let the refrigerator cool them down. Leave the covers of containers cracked open to help food cool faster, but cover tightly once the food is cooled.

For large quantities, divide food into loosely covered shallow containers before refrigerating and then cover tightly when cool. Food cools more rapidly in shallow containers, limiting the growth of bacteria.

If you leave your pizza and other perishable foods at room temperature for more than a couple of hours, toss them out. Some types of bacteria can form a heat-resistant toxin that cooking can't destroy.

Tip 3: Avoid delay – eat in a day

Plan to eat take-out foods and leftovers within a day for greater safety and quality.

Tip 4: Don't miss a beat – safely reheat

Don't reheat take-out food in its original container in the microwave, unless the container is described as safe for microwave use. Chemicals from carryout containers can be absorbed into foods at high temperatures. Safe containers for microwave cooking include glass and glass ceramic cookware, and those labeled for microwave use.

Tip 5: When in doubt – toss it out

You can't always see, smell, or taste bacteria that cause food-borne illnesses. It takes from half an hour to two or more weeks before you get sick from contaminated food. Sometimes it's hard to know if food has been handled safely. If you you're not sure, throw the food away.