

General Food and Reheat Guidelines

These are common guidelines for safely storing, preparing, and reheating your Couch Potatoes meals.

Print this document and keep it handy. Each week, your reheat guidelines will have just the details for that week and will reference these guidelines. Hey-we're trying to save paper here!

Thawing Foods

The refrigerator is the safest way to thaw frozen items. Move them from the freezer to the refrigerator at least a day ahead of time. Dense dishes, like baked pasta and lasagnas, might benefit from two days. Once thawed, they can stay in the refrigerator until you're ready to eat them.

The second best way to thaw frozen foods is in the microwave when you reheat them to eat. Thaw according to your microwave manufacturer's directions, then follow the guidelines here for reheating. Don't use the microwave to thaw items, and then place them in the refrigerator to eat later-like the next day. This can encourage the growth of harmful bacteria-it's like letting the food sit out on the counter...

The third best way is to thaw them in the sink under running water. You can put them into a container and turn on the faucet so that the water fills the container and overflows a little. Don't fill up a container and place the food in it without using running water as this can help the growth of harmful bacteria. Admittedly, this method is wasteful of water and probably not the best idea in San Diego these days! Foods thawed this way should be reheated and eaten that same day.

DO NOT LEAVE FOODS ON THE COUNTERTOP TO THAW!!! After a few hours, the surface of the food will be at an unsafe temperature while the interior will still be frozen. As a rule, you can leave foods out of refrigeration for up to 4 hours before you need to discard them.

Reheat methods

Unless otherwise specified, meals and sides can be reheated following these instructions. Please make sure that you have placed the food in a container safe for the heat method you are using.

Oven: Preheat it first and check that it's at the preset temperature before heating your food. Most dishes will reheat at 350F. Placing a cookie sheet under the container will help protect against spills and make them easier to remove. Also, place items as possible in the center of the oven.

Stovetop burner: It's usually best to add a little water (not so much that it gets watered down). Adjust the burner to not more than medium and reheat gently until warm throughout.

Microwave: wet a paper towel & squeeze out excess water. Lay towel directly on top of food. Microwave, covered, for 3-5 minutes. Check to see if dish is heated through. Please use caution when removing paper towel as it will act as a "steamer". If it is, let it sit covered for 1-2 minutes so that the heat can evenly distribute. If it isn't, continue to microwave in 1 min intervals until it is heated through

Vacuum Bag: Best way: Bring a pot large enough to fit the bag in to a boil. Reduce the heat to simmer and add the bag. Simmer for 5-10 minutes, then turn off the heat. Let the bag sit in the water for an additional 10 minutes. Remove the bag and carefully cut it open with scissors so that the contents don't burn you. Alternatively, you can reheat these items in the oven, stovetop, or microwave. If using the oven or stovetop, transfer the contents to an appropriate container and follow the guidelines for that method. If using the microwave, you can reheat the food in the bag, just make sure to cut off a corner so that steam can escape.

Grill: The grill is a great way to finish many entrees during the summer. The key to good grilling is preheating a clean, oiled grate over medium to medium-high heat before adding the food. Brush the grate clean and oil it. Use can use spray oil, like Pam, to oil the grate-just spray it at an angle so that it doesn't flare up. Place the food on the grill presentation side down and LEAVE IT ALONE! Let it sear grill marks for several minutes, then rotate it about 45 degrees for more marks. Cook the meat on the first side and turn it. Grill on the second side until the inside is cooked to the appropriate internal temperature.

Pan Sear & Oven Roast: This is a classic method of cookery for many type of meat entrees. Preheat the oven to 400F. Heat an oven proof heavy-bottom saute pan or skillet over medium to medium-high heat. The pan should be big enough so that all the items will fit but not be crowded. Pat your meat dry if it's wet so you'll get the best sear. Add a little oil to the pan and place the meat presentation side down, pressing it into the pan a little. It should sizzle. LEAVE IT ALONE NOW FOR SEVERAL MINUTES! Gently push on it. If it's seared, it will release and slide. If there's resistance, let it be until it does slide. When it slides, inspect the searing side to see if it's pleasantly browned. It is when it's browned but not blackish or pale brown. Flip and move the pan to the oven. Roast to the appropriate internal temperature.