What to Do When the Freezer Fails

Don’t panic when your freezer fails. Freezers are well-insulated, and each package of frozen food acts as a “block of ice” protecting the food around it.

Ordinarily, a fully stocked freezer will keep food frozen for two days after losing power; a half-full freezer can maintain freezing power for roughly one day.

So, the first thing to find out is how long your freezer will be out. If it can be started again within a safe time, you don’t need to do anything. Just resist the temptation to keep looking inside. Each time the door is opened, warm air rushes in, reducing the freezer’s effectiveness.

However, if it can’t be restarted in a day or two, the following is suggested.

- Divide your food up among friends’ freezers.
- Find a store, church, or school freezer that will temporarily accept your food, or if possible, rent space in a commercial freezer or cold storage plant.
- Put dry ice in your freezer. Dry ice must be handled carefully. NEVER TOUCH IT WITH YOUR HANDS. It freezes everything it touches.

If possible, have the merchant put the dry ice in a picnic cooler or cardboard box. This makes handling it in the car easier.

If the dry ice must be removed from the carrying case, use heavy gloves or tongs. Work with dry ice in a well-ventilated area. As it evaporates, dry ice can quickly drive the oxygen needed for breathing out of a small area.

Place the dry ice on empty shelves in the freezer around the items to be kept frozen—not directly touching the packages themselves. A layer of cardboard can be put over the freezer items placing the ice on top of the cardboard.

Twenty-five pounds of dry ice should hold a 10-cubic-foot full freezer below freezing for three to four days. If the freezer is half full, the same amount of ice will keep it stable for two to three days.

Judging Your Food after A Freezer-Thaw

Do not stick your head down into the freezer after it has been full of dry ice for several hours. There may not be enough oxygen left for you to breathe. Before examining the food, open the freezer and let outside air mix in.

Meat or poultry that still contains ice crystals may safely be refrozen. For meat and poultry products that have been kept in a refrigerator section, though, or have only managed to stay “cool-feeling,” cooking is a better option. After cooking these items, they can be refrozen.

Throw out any product that has even a slightly unusual color or odor.

When the Refrigerator Fails

When power goes off in the refrigerator, food is normally expected to last at least four to six hours, depending on how warm the room is; higher room temperatures will mean it won’t last as long.

A block of ice can be added to the refrigerator to keep it cool, if there’s a delay in getting the power back on. Dry ice can be added to the freezer compartment.

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Refrigerator Odors

It is hard to get rid of refrigerator odors caused from spoiled food. Here are some ways to remove the odors.

- Unplug refrigerator and remove all food.
- Take out all removable parts and wash with hot water and detergent. Rinse in a disinfectant solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach per gallon of water.
- Wash the inside of the refrigerator with 1/2 cup baking soda per gallon of warm water. Use a brush to scrub the door seal.
- Turn on refrigerator and fill it with clean, crumpled newspaper that has been sprinkled with water.
- Continue to run refrigerator for several days, changing newspapers every other day.
- With refrigerator unplugged, warm the inside walls with a portable hair dryer. Then turn off the dryer and cool the walls with a fan. Repeat until odor is almost gone.
- Turn on refrigerator and leave several small bowls of ground coffee inside for a few days.
- Once all odors are gone, wash the inside again with baking soda and water. Place an open box of baking soda on one of the shelves.
- Your refrigerator is ready to use.

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