

# THE FREEZER IS YOUR FRIEND

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When you work unpredictable hours and don't get to the supermarket often (online shopping is a good friend to those who can swing it), having a bank of frozen meals you can rely on is a key survival tool.

Not being well-schooled in the domestic department, I asked Lydia Buchtman, of the Food Safety Information Council, for her tips.

- › Refrigerate or freeze leftovers immediately after the meal. Divide into small containers so they cool quickly. If leftovers have been in the temperature danger zone for more than 2 hours they should be eaten or refrigerated immediately, and for more than 4 hours they must be thrown out. Always store perishable leftovers in the fridge and use them up within two to three days. When reheating food ensure that it is hot all the way through (use a meat thermometer to ensure it is at least 75° C in the centre).
- › It is a myth that you can't refreeze food [music to my ears!]. From a safety point of view it is fine to refreeze defrosted meat or chicken or any frozen food as long as it was defrosted in a fridge running at 5° C or below. You may have lost some quality in defrosting then refreezing as the cells break down a little and the food can become slightly watery. Another option is to cook the defrosted food and then divide into



small portions and refreeze once it has stopped steaming.

- › Most freezers have a guide on the inside of their lid or door saying how long frozen meat, veggies etc. will last and still be good quality. [This was a total revelation to me. I thought those hieroglyphics were simply decorative! Although I still cannot work out why a shrunken head appears on the bottom of the 3 month column. Since I learned this I've been checking and yes, every freezer has them. Reading these and realising that freezing food isn't equivalent to cryopreservation, I gave my freezer a makeover and threw old items dating from, would you believe, the noughties].
- › Foods you shouldn't freeze are mainly listed because they would lose quality e.g. fatty foods like full cream milk and cheese, uncooked leafy greens or eggs.

The Food Safety Information Council is a health promotion charity which aims to address the estimated 4.1million cases of food poisoning in Australia each year that result in 31,920 hospitalisations, 86 deaths and 1 million visits to doctors. You can find out more about their work here [foodsafety.asn.au](http://foodsafety.asn.au).

