



## Ground beef

Ground beef is more perishable than whole muscle cuts of meat and thus should be handled with particular care. In addition, if any bacteria are present on the surface, the grinding process mixes it throughout the product.

Since freezing ground beef at 0° F (-18° C) keeps the product safe indefinitely, all recommendations for freezing times and packaging are for quality purposes only.

**Fridge time:** 1 to 2 days

**Freezer time:** 3 to 4 months

## Shopping

1. Fresh ground beef goes through a number of color changes during its shelf life. These color changes are normal, and the ground beef remains perfectly wholesome and safe to eat if purchased by the "sell by" date on the package label.
2. Look for ground beef with a bright red color. Ground beef can turn brown after extended exposure to air. While this is not necessarily a sign of spoilage, extended exposure to air reduces the normal shelf life of the product.

## Preparation

1. Refrigerated ground beef prepared within the "use by" date or still in the original packaging should remain a bright, cherry red color on the surface. However, it is normal for the internal portion to be a darker, almost gray color. This is the expected color of beef when it has not been exposed to oxygen in air.
2. Allow at least 24 hours in the refrigerator to defrost a 1 to 1 ½ inch thick package of ground beef, which should be placed on a tray in the refrigerator the day before it will be prepared. Allow 12 hours in the refrigerator to defrost 1/2 to 3/4-inch thick ground beef patties.
3. If using microwave or cold-water submersion methods of thawing, following the general safe handling ([safe handling](#)) instructions.

## Cooking

1. Cook ground beef to an internal temperature of 160° F. For ground beef patties, check the temperature by inserting the stem of the thermometer horizontally into the center. *Internal color is not sufficient to ensure the product has reached the safe temperature of 160 degrees.*
2. Ground beef should be brown in the middle and the texture of cooked meat should have a firm or flaky texture.
3. Due to the natural nitrate content of meatloaf ingredients such as onions and celery, meatloaf may appear pink in the center even when an internal temperature of 160 degrees F has been reached.

## Leftovers

1. If ground beef is refrigerated promptly after cooking (within 2 hours; 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F), it can be safely refrigerated for about 3 or 4 days. If frozen, it should keep its quality for about 4 months.
2. When reheating fully cooked patties or casseroles containing ground beef, be sure the internal temperature reaches 165 °F or it is hot and steaming.

***Note: Pregnant women, children, elderly and immuno-compromised individuals can be at an increased risk of developing foodborne illnesses that can have fatal consequences. Additional care should be taken for safe handling.***