



Food Safety: Removing Odors from Refrigerators & Freezers

Refrigerators and freezers are two of the most important pieces of equipment in the kitchen for keeping food safe. We are instantly reminded of their importance when the power goes off, flooding occurs, or the unit fails, causing food to become unsafe and spoil. The odors that develop when food spoils can be difficult to remove. Use this information to learn how to remove odors from units or how to safely discard an affected unit.

To Remove Odors from Refrigerators and Freezers

If food has spoiled in a refrigerator or freezer and odors from the food remain, they may be difficult to remove. The following procedures may help but may have to be repeated several times.

- Dispose of any spoiled or questionable food.
- Remove shelves, crispers, and ice trays. Wash them thoroughly with hot water and detergent. Then rinse with a sanitizing solution (1 tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water).

- Wash the interior of the refrigerator and freezer, including the door and gasket, with hot water and baking soda. Rinse with sanitizing solution as above.
- Leave the door open for about 15 minutes to allow free air circulation.

If odors remain, try any or all of the following:

- Wipe inside of unit with equal parts vinegar and water. Vinegar provides acid which destroys mildew.
- Leave the door open and allow to air out for several days.
- Stuff both the refrigerator and freezer with rolled newspapers. Close the door and leave for several days. Remove paper and clean with vinegar and water.
- Sprinkle fresh coffee grounds or baking soda loosely in a large, shallow container in the bottom of the refrigerator and freezer.
- Place a cotton swab soaked with vanilla inside the refrigerator and freezer. Close door for 24 hours. Check for odors.
- Use a commercial product available at hardware and housewares stores. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.



If Odors Cannot Be Removed

If odors cannot be removed, then the refrigerator or freezer may need to be discarded. If you need to discard the refrigerator or freezer, discard it in a safe manner:

- “Childproof” old refrigerators or freezers so children do not get trapped inside. The surest way is to take the door off.
- If the door will not come off, chain and padlock the door permanently and close tightly, or remove or disable the latch completely so the door will no longer lock when closed.

It is unlawful in many jurisdictions to discard old refrigerators or freezers without first removing the door.

Depending on where you live, your appliance will be picked up by your solid waste provider, a recycler, a retailer (if you buy a new unit), or program sponsored by local or regional utilities.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline** or **1-888-674-6854**, TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday

from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EST (English or Spanish).

Listen to timely recorded food safety messages at the same number 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send e-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7



AskKaren.gov