CUSTOM MEAT GUIDE · STEP 4: AFTER PICKUP

Freezer Storage, Freezer Burn, and Thawing

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THE SHORT ANSWER

Meat kept at 0°F stays **safe indefinitely**; the times you see are about quality. Plan to use steaks and roasts within **4 to 12 months** and ground meat within **3 to 4 months**. Thaw it in the refrigerator, in cold water changed every 30 minutes, or in the microwave if you'll cook it right away.

Safe Forever, Best Within a Year

Food safety guidance is clear on this: meat stored constantly at 0°F will always be safe, and only the quality suffers with long storage. Over many months, frozen meat slowly dries out and picks up off flavors, so the storage times below are about eating quality, not about when it goes bad.

How Long It Keeps

At 0°F	Best quality within
Steaks, chops, and roasts (beef or pork)	4–12 months
Venison steaks and roasts	6–12 months
Ground beef, pork, or venison	3–4 months
Raw sausage	1–2 months
Bacon	1 month
Cured ham, uncooked	3–4 months
Fully cooked ham	1–2 months

Sources vary a little (some give steaks and roasts 6 to 12 months), but the pattern holds. Salt speeds up rancidity in the freezer, which is why bacon, sausage, and other seasoned or cured meats have the shortest times. Use those first.

Jerky is a different case. Properly dried jerky keeps about two weeks at room temperature in a sealed container; refrigerate or freeze it to keep it longer.

Freezer Burn

Freezer burn is meat drying out where air reaches its surface. It shows up as grayish-brown, leathery spots. It isn't a safety problem, just a quality one: cut the dry spots away before or after cooking and the rest is fine.

The fix is keeping air away from the meat. Our cuts are wrapped in stretch film freezer wrap and labeled, so keep the wrap intact and rewrap any package that gets torn. Vacuum packaging helps reduce freezer burn too, which is why our jerky and snack sticks come vacuum sealed if you'd like.

Thawing Safely

In the refrigerator (the best way)

Plan ahead: allow about a day for every 5 pounds, and at least a full day for a pound of ground meat. Once thawed, cook ground meat within 1 to 2 days, and steaks, chops, and roasts within 3 to 5 days. Meat thawed in the refrigerator can go back in the freezer, though it may lose a little quality.

In cold water

Keep the meat in a sealed, leak-proof package, submerge it in cold water, and change the water every 30 minutes. A 1-pound package takes about an hour; 3 to 4 pounds, about 2 to 3 hours. Cook it right after thawing, and don't refreeze it unless it's been cooked.

In the microwave

Fine when you're in a hurry, but cook the meat right away, since parts of it can start to warm or cook while it thaws.

Or cook it frozen

It's safe to cook meat straight from the freezer. Plan on about 50% more cooking time than for thawed meat.

Organizing a Full Freezer

A rule of thumb is about 1 cubic foot of freezer space for every 30 to 35 pounds of packaged meat. Keep cuts of the same kind together, put the newest packages at the bottom, and keep a list on the lid so nothing gets lost in the back. To see if a share will fit, try our freezer space planner.

Questions? Call Howard & Mia.
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Read it online, with calculators:
handmcustommeat.com/guide/freezer-storage/

Sources

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Buying meat for the freezer (ASC-179), University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension
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Figures are typical ranges from these sources; every animal is different. Prices are subject to change.