



Consumer Alert

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. For additional information, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at

1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) TTY 1-800-256-7072.

To Remove Odors from Refrigerators and Freezers

If food has spoiled in a refrigerator or freezer and odors from the food remain then they can 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 teaspoon chlorine bleach per quart of water).
- Wash the interior of the refrigerator, 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 odor remains, 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 unit.
- Place a cotton swab soaked with vanilla inside the freezer. Close door for 24 hours. Check for odors.
- Use a commercial product available at hardware and housewares stores. Follow the manufacturers' instructions.

If Odors Remain

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

- "Childproof" old refrigerators 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 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.

For food safety information, call:

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TTY: 1-800 256-7072**

Or visit the Web site:
www.fsis.usda.gov

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