

# Safely Packaging and Freezing Food

Whether you work full-time, care for a loved one, attend school, or run a household, you don't always have time to prepare nutritious meals. Do-It-Yourself Frozen Dinners can be a convenient alternative on those busy days when there isn't time to cook from scratch.

## Consider freezing:

- Leftovers that cannot be used immediately.
- Foods that ordinarily take a long time to prepare.
- Seasonal fruits and vegetables.
- Foods you can prepare in quantity.

## Tips for Freezing

Select only fresh, high quality ingredients because freezing, thawing and reheating will cause some nutritional value to be lost.

Slightly undercook prepared foods – they will finish cooking when reheated.

Cool foods quickly before packaging. Place shallow containers of food into a large pan of ice or ice water. Stirring will help cool the food faster.

Freeze food promptly as soon as it is cooled to room temperature.

The temperature of the freezer should not go above 0°F. Fluctuating temperatures and temperatures that are not low enough cause loss of quality.

Foods that do not freeze well include mayonnaise, cream puddings and fillings, custard, gelatin salads, cheese, the whites of hard cooked eggs and uncooked egg yolks, and fruits and vegetables with a high water content, such as lettuce or citrus fruit.

## Tips for Packaging

Use moisture/vapor resistant freezer containers or wrappings.

Pack food compactly into the container to reduce the amount of air in the package. Allow room in the package for the food to expand as it freezes.

Choose containers by the number of servings you will want to serve; Quart containers hold four to six servings; pints, two to three.

Use containers with wide top openings. Food can then be removed without thawing.

Freeze the prepared foods in your favorite casserole dish. The food can be removed after freezing, wrapped and returned to the freezer for storage.

Label all packages with the food's name, date and baking instructions, if any.

Keep a list of foods you freeze and plan to eat them within one or two months.