Food Cooling

Food must be cooled from 135F to 70F within the first two hours and then to below 41F within a total of six hours from starting the cooling process. Food can be left at room temperature until it drops to 135F.

Here are the best ways to quickly cool food:

- Placing the food in shallow pans
- Separating the food into smaller or thinner portions (ex: large roasts)
- Using rapid cooling equipment like ice wands
- Stirring the food in a container placed in an ice water bath on the counter or in your food prep sink
- Using containers (like metal instead of plastic) that facilitate heat transfer
- Adding ice as an ingredient (ex: refried beans, soups)

You have one opportunity to restart the cooling process if food has not cooled to 70F by the 2 hour mark (the most critical benchmark!). In the scenario the food has not cooled to 70F by the 2 hour mark, you can reheat the food to 165F and start the cooling process again. This can **only be done once** and only **within the first 2 hours.**

*Cooling food should be uncovered or loosely covered and protected from overhead contamination. The top rack of your walk-in can be a good place to cool foods.

*Be sure to place the containers with space between them on the shelf and not to stack them, which would trap the heat inside.

*It is important to log the temperatures of the food you are cooling and the time it takes so you know your cooling method is working.

*Pay attention to foods that are made from room temperature ingredients, like canned tuna, fresh pico de gallo, and potato salad. These foods need to be placed immediately in the walk-in (not a prep top unit) after they are prepared so they can properly cool to below 41F within 4 hours.

*Improper cooling is one of the leading causes of foodborne illness. Cooling food quickly is important to keep bacteria from growing in food while it is in the danger zone (41F-135F).

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