

Ask the Agent

Q—How long can I store opened lunch meat?... cooked ham?... casseroles?...or fresh fruits?

A—Each one of these types of food have their own storage limits. Here is how long you can store them in your refrigerator (with the temperature set at 32—40°F)

Lunch meat: 3—5 days
Cooked ham: 3—4 days (sliced)
Casseroles: 1—2 days
Fresh fruit: 1 month (whole apples)

Some other common holiday menu item refrigerator storage limits that could also be helpful:

Homemade bread: 2—3 weeks
Baked fruit pies: 2—3 days
Baked pumpkin pie: 2—3 days
Homemade dips: 2 days
Cream pies: 1—2 days
Prepared vegetables: 2 days
Meat leftovers: 3—4 days
Leftover broth/gravy: 1—2 days
Soups/Stews: 2—3 days

I found an excellent list of foods and recommended safe storage limits through the North Dakota State Extension Service. You can access that resource on the Geary County Extension website:

<http://www.geary.ksu.edu>

You will find it following the tabs on the left side of the page:

Health and Nutrition>Food Safety>

Look for **Food Storage Guide**. You will find it in the middle of the page.

Endearing Family Traditions

This time of year is always exciting, but it often makes me a bit melancholy as well. Many of you know that I lost my dad while I was in college. He was an amazing force in our family—the glue, so to speak. He was also the chief cook in our home. He didn't cook out of obligation, but rather out of love of the process and product of it. I seemed to have “inherited” that love from him.

One of his cooking traditions was rising early on Christmas morning to get started on the feast. Dressed in old jeans, a white t-shirt, and loafers, he would clamor through the pots and pans, dig through the casserole dishes and collect various ingredients from “the pantry” - an old wood shelving unit in the basement.



The turkey would go in the oven first, then he would start peeling potatoes and putting the ingredients together for the homemade dressing (which most others call stuffing.) Mom would step in later in the morning to work on the candied yams. Somewhere in between we would often have hot chocolate and toast (still a favorite of mine) and, of course, open gifts.

Although I miss these traditions from my childhood, I have incorporated many of them into my own home while my husband and I have created new ones for our children. For example, on the morning of each child's birthday, I make pancakes. I put a candle in the middle of that child's stack and we all gather to sing a morning “happy birthday.” At each evening meal, we share the thorns and roses from the day (what went well with the day, roses; and what didn't go so great, thorns.) On Christmas morning, we too have hot chocolate and toast, stay in our pajamas, and open gifts mid-morning.

Building family traditions is an important way to develop strong family relationships. They have an endearing and enduring value that make celebrations personal. They help everyone in the family feel connected, valued, and loved. A **family tradition** is defined as an activity that is significant and meaningful for family members that is coordinated and repeated over time. Remembering your favorite family traditions usually leads to feelings of comfort and care. Traditions such as the weekly Sunday meal, family get-togethers at Thanksgiving or Christmas, vacations at a favorite location, or reading together at bedtime give families the opportunity to connect, celebrate, and build their sense of community with one another.

As you approach Christmas, reflect on what your important traditions are. What family traditions would you like to establish? This newsletter is dedicated to family traditions and building a stronger sense of community. Enjoy!

Make e-cycling a new family tradition...

The EPA reports the average American household uses about 24 electronic products like personal computers, mobile phones, televisions, and e-readers. With an ever increasing supply of new electronic gadgets, Americans discard more than 2 million tons of obsolete electronic products annually.

The impact on our environment is substantial, not to mention the crunch it can put on our pocket book. Each family can help these impacts become positive rather than negative by following e-cycling practices

"E-cycle is the practice of reusing, donating or redistributing an electronic item until the end of its life cycle and then recycling the item when it is no longer usable. E-cycling is generally practiced to reduce the amount of electronic components that are discarded when users purchase new components."

<http://www.techopedia.com/definition/2106/e-cycle>

So, what can a family do to reduce the impact of electronic waste (e-waste) entering our landfills?

1) Preventing waste is the first and best option.

This can be done by getting your outdated computer up to speed with a new operating system. There are several businesses in the area that will

refurbish old computers so they run like new. If you don't think this is approach, try donating used electronics for reuse by other individuals. There are businesses that accept donations of electronics that are still operating. For example, BestBuy and Staples both have programs related to refurbishing and recycling selected computers that still work.

2) The next best option is to **recycle** the electronic. Recyclers recover more than 100 million pounds of materials from electronics each year. Our local Geary County Recycling accepts electronic equipment that they send off to a locally owned company "Collective Good" that dismantles the equipment in order to recycle the various materials used to make it.

3) Families can be environmentally **responsible** buy "environmentally preferable electronics." Electronics of this nature have been constructed in a way that has a reduced environmental impact. Perhaps they contain fewer toxic components, they are made with recycled materials, are more energy efficient, or use minimal packaging materials.

With the many electronic gifts that will be exchanged during the Christmas season, consider how your family can stake steps to reduce e-waste.

Buying Gifts—Affording the Tradition

According to the National Retail Federation, more than 90% of Americans celebrate either Christmas, Kwanza or Hanukkah. This year, this same group is projecting that Americans will spend more than \$600 billion just on Christmas.

A recent Gallup poll indicates that the average family would spend \$781 for Christmas in the month of November alone! That doesn't include purchases during the month of December.

The unique expenses that surround Christmas are not limited to gifts alone, though. Forbes magazine offers this additional list of expenses for the average American family:

Christmas Tree:	\$ 41.50
Cards And Postage:	\$ 32.43
Floral Arrangements:	\$ 22.61
Food And Candy:	\$ 95.04
Decorations:	\$ 51.43
Travel:	<u>\$960.50</u>
TOTAL	\$1,203.51

Yikes! This can have a devastating effect on your family budget if you didn't include gift purchases and other Christmas expenses in your budget. It's not too late to curb your last minute spending and put a plan in place to help you recover if you have overspent this year. Begin with the most "painful" part—itemize your Christmas expenses. Make a list of where the money you spent on Christmas went. Next, make your post-season game plan:

- Identify how much you have in savings.
- Determine how much monthly income you can put towards your Christmas expenses (don't forget to include credit card debt.)
- Create a 3-4 month spending plan to eliminate your Christmas debt.
- Avoid adding to your debt during the 3-4 months you are working through your plan. You don't want to go two steps forward only to end up falling behind five more.
- If you are unable to eliminate your Christmas debt with the steps above, take a look at your income taxes. If you are getting a refund, make sure you file electronically and file early. This will help you reduce the amount of interest and service charges you are paying on the credit card debt you incurred.
- The last step is begin now to plan for next year. Take another look at your itemized Christmas expenses from this year, consider how and when you spent your funds, and create a plan to begin saving money early in the year to balance out the spending you take on in November and December.

Although I like to get my shopping done early, that doesn't work for everyone and it may not be the best alternative. Research shows that Christmas shoppers who buy early spend 14% more than those who don't. Regardless of when you decide to shop, it's important that you have cash to pay for it and avoid the debt.

Healthy Habits

Holiday Action Plan

During the holiday season our to-do lists seem to grow longer and our opportunities to stay in an exercise routine seem to become fewer. Maintaining the balance between the busyness of the season and the need our body has to stay active, you may be feeling a bit stressed.

However, staying active is often the very best thing you can do—exercise will give you energy (really, I'm not joking!) and will reduce stress and tension as well as help burn some of the calories from your holiday feasts!



www.ymcadc.org

So, how do you find that balance? Here are some quick tips to help you get a "running start." (pun intended!)

Traveling: Many families take the extended school vacation as an opportunity to celebrate the season with friends and family away from home. Planning ahead to make room in your festivities for physical exercise will make your goal easier to reach. Do your homework before you leave.

1) Search information on walking, running or park trails in the area you will be staying. 2) If you are staying in a hotel, find out if they have an exercise room. 3) If you are

staying with family, ask if they have any exercise equipment you would have access to. 3) Search for nearby gyms and contact them to find out if they have guest passes you can purchase. 4) If you are a member of a gym at home, ask one of the exercise coaches to help you develop a workout that is both simple and easy to do with little or no equipment or space.

In my family, it is not uncommon for us to go for a walk after the big meal. Sometimes that's the only way my siblings and I can have a peaceful conversation. My children also provide an excellent "out" for going outside for fresh air and exercise—they love to play catch, kickball, or the classic hide and seek game.

Take advantage of the "down time" during the televised football bowl game to do isometric exercises—squeeze and hold the abs or the glutes to work those sedentary muscles.

Make physical activity a part of your family tradition during the holidays. Invite your family members to participate so that you can enjoy their company at the same time!

Connecting with Kids

My dad and I connected in many ways. But as I mentioned in the cover story—we both love to cook. I have been fortunate to have 3 boys that love to be in the kitchen with me. I try to make sure they each get weekly "kitchen time" with mom. In honor of our family tradition, here are a couple recipes I make with my kids that you might enjoy:

Mark's Rock and Roll Tortillas

10" whole wheat tortillas
1 c. crunchy-style peanut butter
2 Fuji apples (that's his favorite kind but any sweet crunchy apple will work!)
Table knife, paper towel, and microwave

Wash, core, and slice apples (8 wedges per apple.) Spread 2 T. peanut butter on the tortilla. On the edge of the tortilla, place 1 apple wedge and roll the tortilla up. Continue the process until you have at least 1 tortilla for each person. You will have left over apple wedges to eat with your tortilla. Warm individual tortillas on a paper towel in the microwave for 10 seconds on high. Room from the microwave and enjoy with a glass of cold milk!

Joey's Favorite Corn Dip

Mix together:
4 (11 oz.) cans shoepeg corn (drained)
1 (4 oz.) can diced green chilies (drained)
1 small red onion, peeled and diced
2 green onions, peeled and chopped (include tops!)
1 (16 oz.) container low fat or light sour cream
1 c. real mayonnaise (use fat free to reduce calories)
4 c. shredded mild or sharp cheddar cheese
Pepper to taste, mix and chill for at least 2 hours before serving. (Mom's note: You can add 2 diced jalapeno pepper's if you want more "kick")
Serve with tortilla chips or serve as a side dish.

Zach's After School Snack

Combine the following ingredients in a large bowl and enjoy! Cover with plastic lid and store on counter top for up to 1 month (if it lasts that long!)
Honey Roasted Oat Cereal—2 cups
Cracklin' Oat Cereal—2 cups
Nuts—1 cup (Zach likes honey roasted peanuts)
Vanilla Yogurt Covered Raisins (1 small package)
Sometimes mom makes me add Craisins—1/2 cup.

Upcoming Geary County Extension Programs

****Requires pre-registration. Call 238-4161 to pre-register****

January

- 6— Eat Smart, Move More—12th Street Community Center Nutrition and Wellness program is free and open to the general public. Please call the 12th Street Community Center (238-1678) to reserve your seat.
- 6— MPI Parenting Class—Devin Educational Resource Center, 123 Eisenhower is 6-session class open to any parents with children ages toddler to teens to help support and equip parents with their challenging task of raising children. Please call the Geary County Extension office to register for the program. The class consists of 6 consecutive sessions held from 6-8 p.m. held on Tuesday nights. A \$10/session registration fee is required before the class begins. The total cost for the class is \$60.00 per individual or \$90.00 for the parent and a support person.
- 8— Eat Smart, Move More— Nutrition Education Classes—WIC clients and families are invited to participate in the 10:00 a.m. nutrition and meal preparation class offered at the Geary County Health Department. Please call the Geary County Health Department (762-5788) to reserve your seat.

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