Home Refrigeration: Coils, Gaskets and Temperatures

Your home’s refrigerator is an important piece of equipment for your family. It is the only appliance that operates 24 hours a day, making it a significant user of electricity. It is also the base of your food storage. Storing foods at the proper temperature is the key to avoiding foodborne illnesses, sometimes called “food poisoning.”

There are several things you can do to keep your energy use down and keeping your food and ultimately your family safe.

Saving Energy with Your Refrigerator

Because your refrigerator runs 24 hours a day, one of the best ways to save energy is to be sure the gasket surrounding the door is not damaged and has a tight fit all the way around. You can test the tightness of the seal using the dollar bill test. Place a dollar bill in the space between the gasket and the refrigerator. Now tug on the dollar bill. It should not easily slip out. If it does, the gasket may need to be replaced.

You can replace the gasket on your own, but this would be considered an advanced home repair project. Gasket replacement by a professional can range from $150 - $300.

Other ideas for reducing energy use from the refrigerator include:

- Be sure your refrigerator stays clean and there is space for air to circulate throughout the interior of the refrigerator.
- Don’t stand in front of an open refrigerator door. This not only wastes energy but warms the food you are trying to protect by keeping it cold.
- Keep your freezer full with items tightly packed, to help maintain the proper temperature. You could use an empty milk or juice container filled with water to take up space.
- Vacuum the coils on your refrigerator at least once every six months to keep the appliance working properly.
- Do not place the refrigerator in direct sunlight or near the oven or stove as this makes the compressor work harder to keep the appliance cool.
- If replacing a refrigerator, look for an Energy Star® rated model and consider a model without water in the door and/or an ice maker.
- Keep about 2” of space around the entire refrigerator to keep air flow moving.
Keeping Your Food Safe

About 5,000 people in the United States die each year from foodborne illness. Keeping food, including leftovers, at the proper temperature, will help avoid these illnesses.

- Your refrigerator should have an internal temperature of 38° - 40°F. You can easily measure the temperature with an appliance thermometer.
- The freezer should be checked for the proper temperature which is 0°F or lower. Refrigerator and freezer temperature gauges can be purchased at any store or perhaps from your local Extension office.
- Cool foods by placing them in smaller, shallow containers before placing them in the refrigerator for storage.
- Do not stack warm containers of food; spread them out until they are cold and then you can go back and organize and stack them if desired.
- Always thaw foods in the refrigerator and never on the counter. Other acceptable methods of thawing include thawing in cold water that is changed every 30 minutes or thawing in the microwave followed by immediate cooking.
- Be sure to put leftovers away within two hours of removing them from the refrigerator.
- Reheat leftovers to an internal temperature of 165°F.

For more information contact your local county Extension office or call 1-800-ASK-UGA1