



An Extended Guide · No. 1768

Keep the Door Closed

The simplest, most
powerful outage habit

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! Read this first — when in doubt, throw it out

Here is the one rule that keeps your family safe when the power goes out: when in doubt, throw it out. Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors shut, and know the clock — a closed refrigerator keeps food safe for about 4 hours, and a full freezer holds its cold for about 48 hours (about 24 hours if it is only half full). Any perishable food — meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, soft cheese, cut fruit, and leftovers — that has been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 hours or more should be thrown out. Never taste food to decide whether it is safe; many of the germs that cause food poisoning leave no smell, taste, or change you can see. Keeping the doors closed is exactly what makes those 4-hour and 48-hour hold times possible in the first place — it is the one habit every other rule in this guide depends on.

Rule one, above all else: keep the doors closed

If you take away only one habit from anything Bill's Home Tech has written about outages, let it be this one — it costs nothing and it works.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. Of everything I could tell you about keeping food safe during an outage, this is the single habit that matters most, and it happens to be the easiest one too: just leave the doors shut.

You don't need a generator, a fancy thermometer, or a single gadget to make this work. You need a little patience and a household that agrees to leave the handle alone until it truly matters.

★ Worried right now, mid-outage?

If the power's out and you're standing in front of the fridge wondering whether to open it, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm glad to talk you through it, no charge.

The whole guide, on one page

If you only remember a handful of lines from this guide, make them these.

- ❑ Keep the doors closed — that's the rule everything else supports.
- ❑ Every time you open one, you lose cold air you can't get back.
- ❑ Know exactly what you want before you open the door, not while standing in front of it.
- ❑ Keep a small cooler of ice for the drinks and snacks everyone reaches for, so the main door stays shut.
- ❑ A full fridge or freezer holds its cold longer than a half-empty one.
- ❑ Write down the time the power went out the moment you notice.
- ❑ When in doubt, throw it out.

✓ Say it out loud as a house rule

Something as simple as agreeing out loud — 'we keep the doors closed during an outage' — makes everyone in the house, young and old, far more likely to actually do it.

What actually happens the moment you open the door

There is nothing mysterious about why this rule works — it is just simple physics happening right in your kitchen.

Cold air is heavier than warm air, so the moment you open a fridge or freezer door, the cold air you've been storing spills out over the bottom of the door and onto the floor, while warmer room air rushes in to take its place.

That cold air took hours to build up in the first place, as the compressor ran quietly in the background. It disappears in seconds the moment the door swings open, and the compressor can't recharge it if the power is out.

✓ Cold sinks, so think about it that way

This is also why a chest freezer, which opens from the top, loses far less cold than an upright with a front door — the cold air has nowhere to spill out to. More on that later in this guide.

Just checking adds up faster than you'd think

One quick peek seems harmless. A dozen quick peeks over an afternoon is a different story.

A fridge that should comfortably hold safe temperatures for about 4 hours closed can be in trouble well before lunchtime if it gets opened every time someone walks past and wonders what's for lunch.

It isn't any single open that causes the problem — it's the habit of treating the fridge like business as usual when the power is out. Every member of the household adds to the same clock.

! A curious house empties a fridge's cold fast

Kids, grandkids, and houseguests checking 'just to see' throughout the day is one of the most common ways a fridge warms up faster than it needed to. Agree on the rule together, early.

Decide what you need before you touch the handle

The best way to make an open count is to plan it before you ever pull the door open.

Take a second to picture exactly what you're going for — the milk, the lunch meat, tomorrow's dinner — before you open the door. Standing there with the door open while you decide is exactly the habit that drains the cold.

- Think it through first: what do I need, and where is it sitting?
- Group items you reach for often onto one shelf, so a single open covers more ground.
- If several people need something, send one person for everyone's items at once instead of several separate trips.
- Open, reach, grab, close — in that order, every time.

✓ A mental map saves real cold

If you know your fridge well, you already know where things live. During an outage, that mental map is worth more than usual — use it to move fast.

Move the grab-and-go items to a cooler

The drinks and snacks everyone reaches for all day long are exactly the items that tempt people to keep opening the main fridge.

Pack a small cooler with ice and move the things people reach for most — drinks, sandwich items, snacks for the kids — into it early in the outage. Once that cooler is set up, the main fridge door can stay shut far more of the day.

Keep the cooler at 40 degrees or below and check it with a thermometer, the same as you would the fridge. A cooler that gets opened often is still far less costly than opening the main refrigerator over and over.

✓ One cooler, one job

Think of the cooler as the fridge's stunt double for the day — it takes all the casual opens so the real fridge, with all its harder-to-replace food, stays sealed.

A full freezer is your best friend in an outage

This fact is worth repeating in every guide I write, because it changes how long your food actually stays safe.

A full freezer holds safe temperatures for about 48 hours with the door closed. A half-full one holds for only about 24. All that frozen food acts like one giant block of ice, keeping everything near it cold longer.

If your freezer has empty space, fill it with jugs of water before a storm ever arrives. Use plastic jugs, not glass, and leave a little room at the top since water expands as it freezes.

✓ Do this before the forecast turns bad

Frozen water jugs are the cheapest insurance policy in this whole guide. Fill a few whenever you notice empty space, and they'll be ready long before you need them.

Make it a rule the whole house follows

This habit only works if everyone in the house is in on it — not just the person who read this guide.

Kids and grandkids are naturally curious, and houseguests often don't realize an outage is even happening in the kitchen. A five-minute conversation before or during the outage — 'we're keeping the fridge shut today' — goes a long way.

A note taped right on the door is a simple, visual reminder for anyone who forgets, including you. It doesn't need to be fancy, just visible.

✓ Make the littlest ones part of the plan

Kids love a job. Put a young grandchild in charge of reminding everyone to 'keep it shut' and you'll likely get better cooperation than any note could manage alone.

One sticky note does two jobs at once

The same note on the door that reminds everyone to keep it shut can also hold the single most useful fact of the whole day.

The moment you notice the power is out, write the time on that note. Later, when you're deciding what to keep and what to toss, that one detail turns a stressful guess into an easy fact.

Without a written time, people tend to guess low — 'it's only been an hour or two' — when it's often been longer. The note doesn't lie, even when memory does.

★ Not sure how to use that time once you have it?

Once you know when the power went out, I can help you work out what that means for your fridge and freezer. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Keeping a door closed sounds the same everywhere, but what's behind that door — and how many doors there are — looks different from house to house.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, outages tend to run shorter, and there's usually just one fridge and maybe one freezer to manage. A simple 'open it once' plan for the day covers most of what you need.

- One fridge, one plan — agree on it once and the whole household can follow it.
- Shorter typical outages mean the closed-door clock often covers you with room to spare.
- A single cooler by the door for grab-items is usually all the backup you need.
- Neighbors or a nearby still-powered store make ice easy to restock if things run long.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, there are often more doors to manage — a big chest freezer of garden produce or meat, maybe a second fridge or freezer out in the garage. If you're on a private well, remember the pump needs power too, so keeping any backup power running is part of the same door-discipline plan.

- More units mean more doors and more discipline — decide together which ones matter most.
- A chest freezer full of harvest or meat is worth extra care — keep the lid shut and let the cold sink.
- A garage freezer is easy to forget about — add it to the same household rule as the kitchen fridge.
- If a generator also runs the well pump, door discipline stretches its fuel and its attention further too.

★ Somewhere in between?

Whether you've got one fridge or five doors to manage across the property, tell me your setup and I'll help you build a plan that actually fits. Call (330) 200-8042.

Why a chest freezer forgives an open a little better

Not all doors behave the same way, and it's worth knowing the difference if you have both kinds in the house.

A chest freezer opens from the top, and cold air sinks. That means when you lift the lid, most of the cold stays put in the box instead of spilling out onto the floor the way it does with an upright's front door.

An upright is still perfectly fine — it's just less forgiving of a slow open or a door left ajar. Either way, the same rule applies: open with a plan, and close it fast.

✓ Full still beats forgiving

A full chest freezer opened carelessly can still lose more cold than a full upright opened quickly and closed right away. The habit matters more than the shape of the box.

Door discipline buys time — the thermometer decides

Keeping the door shut is the habit that buys you time. On its own, it isn't how you know the food is actually safe.

Keep an appliance thermometer in the fridge and another in the freezer, all the time. The fridge should read 40 degrees or below; the freezer, 0 degrees or below. After an outage, that reading — not a guess about how careful you were with the door — is what tells you the real story.

Think of the closed door as buying you time on the clock, and the thermometer as the one that actually calls the game. Both matter, but only one of them can be trusted completely.

! Never skip the thermometer, even if you were careful

Even a household that did everything right on the door can't feel the difference between 38 degrees and 42 degrees by hand. Read the number before you decide anything.

The extra fridge or freezer deserves the same rule

A second unit out in the garage or basement is easy to forget about during an outage, but it deserves the same discipline as the kitchen fridge.

The good news is a second unit is usually opened far less often than the kitchen fridge, simply because it's out of the daily routine. That's an advantage — fewer opens naturally means it holds its cold longer.

If you have more than one fridge or freezer, decide ahead of time which one matters most — the one with this year's harvest, the bulk meat, or simply the fullest one — and give that one the most careful door discipline of all.

✓ Out of sight shouldn't mean out of mind

Put a thermometer in every unit you own, not just the kitchen one. It's the only way to know a forgotten garage freezer actually held its cold.

Your door plan for outage day

Having the order of operations settled ahead of time keeps the whole household on the same page when it matters.

- ❑ The moment you notice the power's out, write the time on a note and tape it to the fridge.
- ❑ Tell everyone in the house: doors stay closed starting now.
- ❑ Set up a small cooler with ice for drinks, snacks, and lunch items.
- ❑ Decide what you need before each open, then open, grab, and close quickly.
- ❑ Check the thermometer before deciding anything about the food inside.
- ❑ If the freezer has empty space, frozen jugs help — note it for next time if you don't have any ready.
- ❑ When in doubt about any food, throw it out.

★ Want help setting this up before the next outage?

On a visit I can help you place thermometers, plan where a cooler goes, and get a few water jugs in the freezer ready to go. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes people make with the door

A handful of small habits explain most of the cold that gets lost needlessly during an outage.

- **Peeking repeatedly just to check** on food that isn't going anywhere — it drains cold faster than almost anything else.
- **Propping the door open** while carrying groceries in or sorting through items, instead of closing it between trips.
- **Overloading one open** by not planning ahead, then standing there deciding with the door wide open.
- **Leaving it ajar** without realizing it, especially with a full shelf pressing against the seal.
- **Letting a half-empty freezer sit half empty**, when a few frozen jugs would have doubled its cold hours for free.

! The door left ajar is the sneaky one

A door that doesn't fully latch can undo hours of careful discipline without anyone noticing. After every open, give it a second push to be sure it's sealed.

Don't celebrate by flinging the doors open

The moment the lights come back on is a relief — but it's not quite the moment to treat the fridge like nothing happened.

Check your thermometers first, before you fling both doors open to restock or show the family everything survived. If the fridge held at or below 40 degrees, you're in good shape. If the freezer food still has ice crystals or reads 40 degrees or below, it's safe to refreeze or cook.

Give the compressor a little while to catch back up to its normal temperature before you load it back up with a fresh grocery trip. It's already working hard to recover.

✓ Write down what you learned

Note how long the power was out and what the thermometers read when it came back. That's exactly the kind of detail that makes the next outage easier to handle.

This habit is worth keeping every single day

Everything in this guide is really just good kitchen habit, dressed up for an emergency.

Even on a perfectly ordinary day with the power on, a fridge that's opened less often and closed faster runs its compressor less, which means less wear and a little less on the electric bill.

Practicing the habit now — deciding what you need before you open the door, closing it quickly, keeping it reasonably full — means it's already second nature by the time you actually need it during an outage.

✓ Practice makes it automatic

The households that handle outages calmly are usually the ones where good door habits were already routine beforehand. It's one less thing to think about on a stressful day.

A worn seal wastes cold every day, outage or not

All the door discipline in the world can't help much if the seal itself isn't doing its job.

Here's a simple check: close the door on a dollar bill so it hangs half in and half out, then gently pull it out. If it slides out easily with little resistance, the seal may be worn and letting cold air leak out around the edges all the time, not just when the door is open.

Try it at a few spots around the door, since a gasket can wear unevenly. A weak seal is worth a look regardless of outages, since it costs you cold and money every single day it goes unnoticed.

✓ A clean seal works better too

Wipe the rubber gasket down now and then with warm, soapy water. Crumbs and sticky spots can keep it from sealing fully, the same as a worn one.

! Read this first — carbon monoxide is the real danger

A running gas generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run a gas generator indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. Run it outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on each floor and outside the bedrooms. A battery or solar power station is the safe indoor alternative — it makes no exhaust at all. Even with backup power running the fridge, every rule in this guide about keeping the door shut still applies.

Backup power helps, but the door rule doesn't retire

If your outages run long or often, backup power is worth considering — just know it doesn't replace anything in this guide.

A gas generator makes plenty of power but must run outdoors only, well away from the house, because its exhaust carries deadly, invisible carbon monoxide. A battery or solar power station makes no exhaust at all, so it's safe to run indoors, right next to the fridge.

✓ A battery power station is safe to use indoors

Unlike a gas generator, a battery or solar power station makes no exhaust and no carbon monoxide, so it is safe to run inside the house right next to the refrigerator. A gas generator is the opposite — it must always run outdoors, well away from doors, windows, and vents.

Whichever path you choose, keep practicing the same door habits from this guide. Backup power keeps the compressor running — it doesn't stop cold air from spilling out every time a door swings open.

Print this page and stick it on the fridge

Keep this where the whole household will actually see it during an outage.

- ☐ Rule one: keep the doors closed.
- ☐ Write down the time the power went out.
- ☐ Know what you need before you open — then open, grab, close.
- ☐ Use a small cooler for drinks, snacks, and lunch items.
- ☐ Fridge holds safe temps about 4 hours closed.
- ☐ Full freezer, about 48 hours closed; half-full, about 24.
- ☐ When in doubt, throw it out.

★ Keep my number right next to it

Tape my number beside this checklist: (330) 200-8042. A quick call costs you nothing if you're ever unsure.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most often about keeping the door closed during an outage.

Q: How much does a quick peek really cost me?

More than it seems. Cold air is heavier than warm air, so it spills out fast the moment the door opens, even for a few seconds. A handful of quick peeks over a day adds up to real lost cold.

Q: Can I open it once a day just to check on things?

One planned, quick open is far better than several casual ones. Know what you need before you open, grab it fast, and close the door right away.

Q: Is a chest freezer really better than an upright during an outage?

It tends to hold cold a little better when opened, since it opens from the top and cold air sinks rather than spilling out. Either style does fine as long as you keep the door discipline up.

Q: Will a full freezer really hold for about 2 days?

Yes — a full freezer holds safe temperatures for about 48 hours with the door closed, versus about 24 for one that's only half full. All that frozen food helps keep everything nearby cold.

Q: Should I unplug the fridge to protect it during an outage?

No. Unplugging doesn't protect the fridge, and it won't be running anyway once the power's out. Leave it plugged in, keep the door closed, and it will start cooling again the moment power returns.

★ Still have a question?

Door habits come up in almost every outage call I get. I'm always glad to talk it through — call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made keeping the door closed and your food safe feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

What a Closed Door Buys You

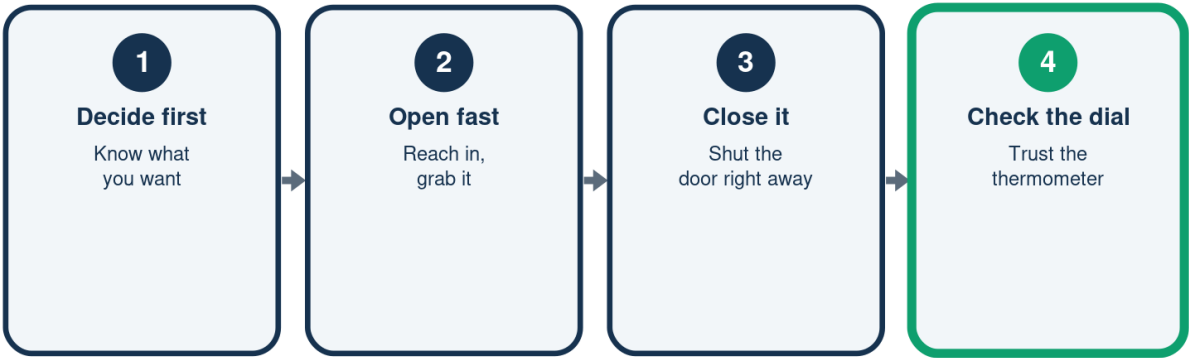
Doors closed the whole time

	Holds Safe Temps For	Every Open Costs
Refrigerator	About 4 hours	Lost cold air
Full freezer	About 48 hours	Warm air rushes in
Half-full freezer	About 24 hours	Add frozen jugs
The rule	Keep it shut	Peek fast if you must

Real USDA/FDA outage guidance -- keep the doors closed.

The Door Rule in Action

One quick open, done right



Plan the open before you pull the handle.

Chest vs Upright When Opened

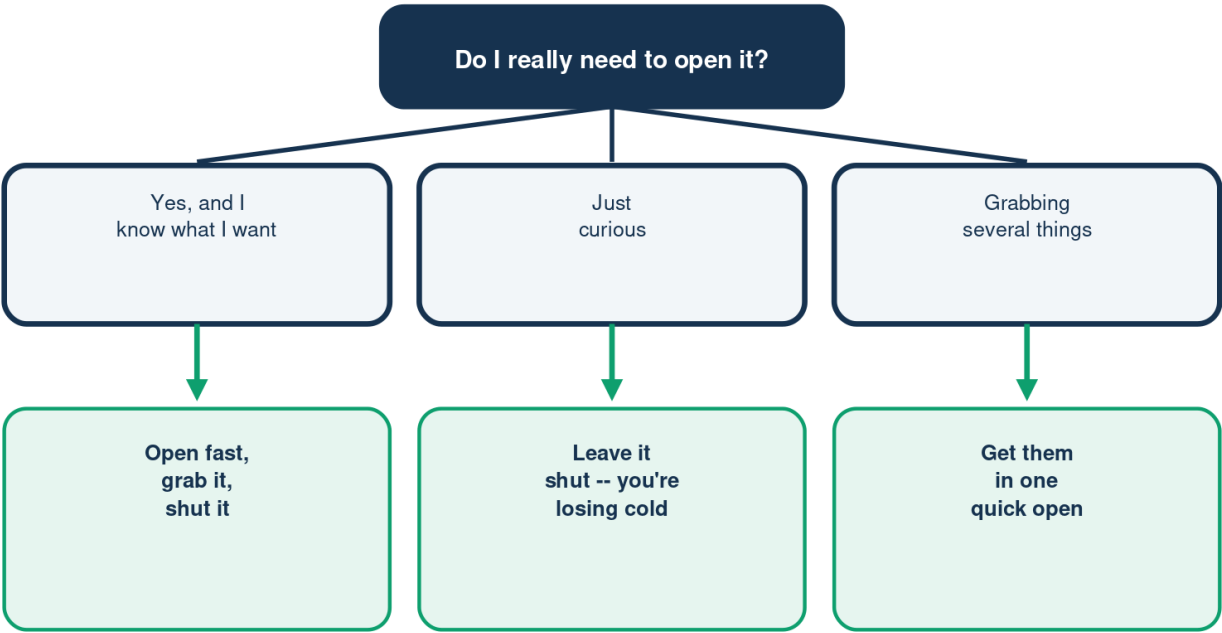
Cold air sinks

	Cold Lost per Open	Best Habit
Chest freezer	Less -- opens on top	Pack it full
Upright freezer	More -- door spills	Group by shelf
Either, full	Best case	Keep it packed
Either, half-empty	Worst case	Add frozen jugs

A full freezer of either style outlasts a half-empty one.

Should I Open the Door?

Before you pull the handle



Every open lets warm air in -- make each one count.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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