



From the Food Bank Kitchen

Food Expiration Dates

With the various dates we see on food packages, it can be tough to know when to keep food and when to toss it. Not all of these dates are safety dates, for example; sell by and use by. For perishable foods such as meats, poultry, pork, and seafood, once the sell by and use by dates pass, try to freeze or use these by the time or shortly after these dates pass.

Date	Examples	May be found on	What it means	When to dispose
Expiration Date	"Expires 12/15/15" "Do not use after 7/7/15"	Baby formula Nutritional supplements Medicine Vitamins	The manufacturer cannot guarantee the nutritional value of the product after this date	Dispose of product on expiration date
Pack Date	"Packed on 4/8/13" Can also be a string of numbers like "22:5306412"	Canned Foods Crackers Cookies Spices	This is the date the food was packaged. Purpose is to assist retailer with arranging foods on shelves.	Cans have a very long shelf life of 2-3 years or longer. Food does not need to be thrown out on this date!
Use by Date	"Best if used by 5/14/15" "Use before 8/9/15"	Baby food Crackers Cookies Cereal Salad Mixes Beverages	This is manufacturer's recommendation for when the food will be at peak flavor or quality. It is not a safety date.	Food in the categories noted here do not need to be thrown out on this date!
Sell by Date	"Sell by 5/12/16" "Pull date 5/12/16"	Milk Yogurt Cheeses Eggs Lunch Meats	The store must sell foods before the date listed, and may donate the foods when they are close to date. Buy the product before this date.	If food has been handled properly, and quality is still good, then it is safe to eat!

Paying attention to these dates, in combination with storing foods properly, can help reduce risk of contracting a food-borne illness. While dates on packages are important guidelines, keeping perishable foods like meat, poultry, dairy and eggs, stored at proper temperatures is critical. For example, if hot dogs are taken to a picnic and left out several hours, they will not be safe if used thereafter, even if the date hasn't expired. Milk left at room temperature or warmer for two hours between store and home will effect its quality. The temperature 'DANGER' zone for food is between 41 and 135°F; this means they are at high risk for bacteria growth which can make people sick. Perishable foods that have been exposed to this temperature zone for 4 hours or longer are considered a serious health risk and should be thrown away.

For more information on keeping food safe, see homefoodsafety.org or fsis.usda.gov and webmd.com food expiration date article

Other Useful Tips:

- Canned items: Cans last a long time, but be sure to use older cans before newer ones. The safety of cans may be effected by exposure to freezing temperatures or extended temperatures above 90°F. Don't consume food from cans that are swollen, rusty, leaking, or badly dented.
- Take perishable foods home immediately from the store or pantry and refrigerate immediately.
- Once a perishable product is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires, as frozen foods are safe indefinitely.
- Meat: do not refreeze meat from pantries. Defrost in the refrigerator and cook immediately.
- Dairy: Your nose is a good indicator. Milk is often good for 5 days past sell date. If it smells or is moldy or sour, toss it.
- Cheeses: hard cheeses like cheddar can last up to 6 months; if you see mold, just cut it out. Processed (American) cheese keeps about 30 days. If soft or shredded cheeses get moldy, throw them away.
- Yogurt: If they have no mold, they can be safely consumed for a month after the date on the container.
- Eggs: Refrigerator life is about 28 days from the date imprinted on the carton. Throw them away after that time.