

Decoding Food Expiration and Sell-By Dates

Food dates are NOT for safety. Instead, they are dates put on by the manufacturer to help the seller determine how long to keep the product on display. The concern is for quality, not safety. The only exception is baby formula, medications and nutritional supplements, which lose their nutritional value after the date. The following information should help you determine when to keep food and when it should go:

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











DAIRY

With dairy, your nose is a good indicator- if smells bad, it should go. If you aren't sure about eggs, try the float test, which is usually (but not always) accurate: if an egg is still good to eat, it will sink to the bottom of a cup of water. If it floats, get rid of it. Yogurt is safe unless you see mold. Hard cheeses last longer than soft cheese, and if you see mold, just cut it out. If soft or shredded cheeses get moldy, throw them away. The length of fridge and freezer life below assumes the product has not been open and has been kept at the proper temperature.

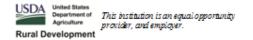
FOOD	FRIDGE LIFE AFTER DATE	FREEZER LIFE AFTER DATE
Cheeses	Processed (American) cheese: 30 days	
	Shredded: 30 days	C manageth a
	Hard (cheddar, parmesan): 6 months	6 months
	Pre-sliced: 14 days	
Margarine	6 months	1 year
Yogurt	14 days	1-2 months
Butter	2 months	1 year
Milk	5 days	Not recommended
Eggs	28 days	Not recommended

Meat

"Meat Rescue" means that the meat was frozen by the grocery store before it reached expiration date.

FOOD	FRIDGE LIFE AFTER DATE	FREEZER LIFE AFTER DATE
Poultry	2 days	9-12 months
Beef	Ground: 2 days	9-12 months
	Steak: 3-5 days	
Pork	Ground: 2 days	9-12 months
	Chop: 3-5 days	

DO NOT REFREEZE THIS MEAT. DEFROST IN YOUR REFRIGERATOR AND COOK IMMEDIATELY; DO NOT LEAVE OUT ON YOUR COUNTER TO DEFROST.











CANNED FOOD

Cans last a long time, but be sure to use older cans before newer ones. Do not consume cans that are leaking, swollen, rusty, or very badly dented.

FOOD	SHELF LIFE AFTER CODE DATE
Beans	3 years
Fish: tuna, salmon, sardines	3 years
Fruit and tomato based products	1-2 years
Soups and vegetables	2-3 years
Meat	2-3 years

CONDIMENTS AND SAUCES

FOOD	SHELF LIFE AFTER CODE DATE
BBQ Sauce	1 year
Honey	Forever
Jam, jelly, preserves	18 months
Ketchup	18 months
Bottled salad dressing	1 year
Salsa	18 months
Spaghetti sauce (can or jar)	18 months

BEVERAGES

FOOD	SHELF LIFE AFTER CODE DATE
Cocoa Mix	36 months
Instant Coffee	2 years
Powdered Creamer	2 years
Boxed Juice	4-6 months
Evaporated/Condensed Milk	1 year











DRY GOODS

FOOD	SHELF LIFE AFTER OPENING	EXTENSION**
Pancake mix	9 months	5 years properly room temp
Dry beans	1 year	30 years properly stored
Bouillon	1-2 years	5 years properly room temp
Bread	3-5 days	3 months frozen
Cereals (cold)	1 year	1-2 years room temp
Dried fruit	6 months	5 years room temp
Macaroni and cheese	1 year	
Nuts	1 year	
Oatmeal (quick or regular)	1 year	30 years room temp
Oils	6 months	
Pasta	2-3 years	30 years room temp
Peanut butter	18 months	4 years room temp
Instant potatoes	1 year	7 years room temp
Rice	White rice: 2 years	30 years room temp
	Brown rice: 1 year	5 years frozen
Spices	2 years	Lose flavor but safe
Toaster pastries	6 months	
Tortillas	3 months	6 months frozen

^{**}Extension: this is how long products can be kept in ideal circumstances- unopened, in airtight containers, at room temperature or frozen.

Adapted by Food Bank of Western Massachusetts from foodshare.org











