



Is this food still good to eat? Helpful information for agencies

Container dates tell you about food quality, not safety.

- Most foods are good to eat past the date printed on the container. (An exception is baby food and infant formula- Do not use these products after the “Use by” date unless approved by the Food Bank).
- You can keep foods safe by storing them at the right temperatures, protecting them from pests, and looking for signs of unsafe food.

Throw out unsafe food. Look for:

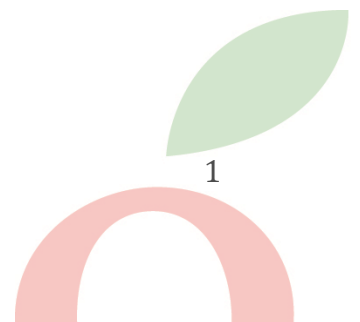
- ◆ Bulging container
- ◆ Leaks
- ◆ Torn package
- ◆ Significant dents, especially on seams
- ◆ Damage from pests
- ◆ Foul odors
- ◆ Rust you cannot wipe off
- ◆ Product Discoloration
- ◆ Homemade container

When in doubt, throw it out!

Here’s what you should know about different foods:

- A. Shelf-Stable Foods:** Keep your pantry temperatures between 50F and 70F. Give out dry foods within 3 months of receiving them. Use older food first- Follow the first in, first out (FIFO) method. Avoid stockpiling food and be generous with slow-moving foods.

Foods	Your Guidelines
Canned food (<i>fruits, vegetables, beans</i>)	If the can is not damaged, canned food will be safe for many months past the date. After 2 years, taste may be off.
Food in glass jars or bottles (<i>salad dressing, mayonnaise</i>)	Throw away if color changes or separation makes product look questionable.
Boxed food (<i>cereal, macaroni & cheese</i>)	Throw away if there are signs of pest damage. Most foods are good at least 1 year past the date.
Bread	Freeze bread close to sell-by date if longer storage is necessary.



B. Refrigerated Foods: Keep your refrigerators at 37F or below. Distribute refrigerated foods within 1 month of receiving them. Follow FIFO. Throw away foods in bulging containers.

Foods	Your Guidelines
Fresh Milk	Drink within 7 days past date printed on container**
Yogurt, Cheeses (<i>Ricotta Cheese, Cottage Cheese</i>)	Eat up to 1 month past date printed on container**
Eggs	Eat up to 1 month past date printed on container**

**These guidelines are set by food companies.

C. Frozen Foods: Keep your freezers at 0F or below. Meat that has been kept frozen on or before the sell by date is safe. Give out frozen foods within 2 months of receiving them. Follow FIFO.

What do all the dates mean?

“USE BY”, “BEST IF USED BY”, or “QUALITY ASSURANCE” DATE: The last date the product is likely to be at top flavor and quality. You will probably find these dates on foods such as cereal, which may lose flavor and quality. **It doesn’t mean the food is unsafe after that date.**

“SELL BY” or “PULL” DATE: This date is for food stores. It shows the last day on which the item should be sold. It takes into account time for the food to be stored and used at home. You should buy the item before the date, but you don’t have to use it by then. Fresh milk, for example, usually keeps its taste for up to 7 days past the sell-by date.

PACK OR PACKAGE DATE: This is the date the food was packed and processed. You can tell which package is fresher and choose that one. **A pack date isn’t an indication of safety.**

“EXPIRATION” DATE: For most foods, this indicates the last date on which they should be eaten or used. Eggs are an exception: if you buy federally graded eggs before the expiration date, you should be able to use them safely for the next 3-5 weeks. (The Food Bank receives extensions on expiration dates for cheeses and other dairy products- the extension is usually one month).

CODED DATE: A series of letters or numbers or both used by the manufacturer to track foods across state lines and, if necessary, recall them. **The code is useful to you when there is a food recall.**

Remember:

- Throw away damaged foods and store foods at the right temperatures.
- If foods are packaged and frozen properly, they will be safe to eat after the expiration date.
- Give out your frozen foods within 2 months of receiving them.

Food Bank of the Southern Tier
Guidelines for Agencies on Shelf-Stable Food Past the Container Date

<u>Item</u>	<u>Discard when container date is past current date by</u>
Beans, dried	1 year
Biscuit or pancake mix	18 months
Bread or cake mix	18 months
Canned goods	2 years high acid, 3 years low acid, 3 years beans, fish
Cereal, ready to eat	1 year, including oatmeal
Cookies	4 months
Cornmeal	1 year
Crackers	9 months
Gravy (jars, cans, packets)	packets 2 years, jarred -3 years
Flour	1 year
Jams, jellies, preserves	18 months
Juice (clear container)	9 months
Juice (canned)	18 months
Ketchup	18 months
Mayonnaise	6 months
Milk, canned	1 year
Milk, carton	6 months
Pasta	2 years
Peanut butter	18 months
Peas, dry split	1 year
Popcorn, microwave	1 year
Potatoes, instant	1 year
Pudding mixes	6 months
Rice, white	2 years

<u>Item</u>	<u>Discard when container date is past current date by</u>
Rice, brown	1 year
Salad dressing	1 year
Salsa	18 months
Sauce, spaghetti	18 months
Soda	3 months
Syrup, pancake	2 years
Water, bottled	indefinite in cool dark place

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If you have questions on food safety or container dates, please contact the Food Bank of the Southern Tier at 607-796-6061.