

Food Storage and Shelf Life Guidelines

Food Dates are NOT Required

The Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture **do not** mandate that foods are date labeled. The only exception is infant formula. Infant food and formula is required to carry an expiration date to ensure nutrient value has not deteriorated.

Any dates placed on food are because of STATE Law or the discretion of the manufacturer.

States can regulate date labels in any way they desire and there are extreme variations among the fifty states.

Connecticut Law requires date labeling on dairy products only. The law reads as follows: *Each person, handler, firm or corporation shall clearly mark each container of milk or milk product, yogurt, cream cheese, cottage cheese, ricotta cheese, soft cheese, eggnog or sour cream offered for retail sale with a last sale date. In accordance with the provisions of chapter 54, the Milk Regulation Board shall adopt regulations establishing standards and criteria for label type size, color and wording that is consistent with national standards and said board may incorporate by reference the Nutritional Education and Labeling Act, 21 CFR 101*

Every case, carton, or container of shell eggs may, but need not have legibly printed thereon...a date by which the eggs must be sold, which shall be referred to in these rules as the "sell by date". The sell-by date shall be no more than 30 days after the pack date. It shall be stated in months and day using the three letter abbreviation of the month followed by the numerical day of the month and preceded by the term SELL BY or EXP. No shell eggs may be offered for sale or sold to a consumer or restaurant more than 45 days after the pack date.

Food Dates are Not for Safety

The FDA allows manufacturers to stamp their product with a date in order to help the seller determine how long to keep the product on display and to help the consumer use the product when it is of best quality. **The date is in no way intended to be a food safety date.** The only regulation is that if a manufacturer **chooses** to use a date on their product, then the FDA allows either coded letters and numbers ("closed dating") to be used on shelf-stable products or if a calendar date is chosen ("open dating") then the FDA requires that it contain the month, day and year along with a phrase explaining the meaning of that date.

Definitions of Common Code Dates:

Date	Examples	May be found on	What it Means	When to Dispose
Expiration Date	"expires 12/15/2013" "do not use after 12/15/2013"	baby food baby formula nutritional supp. medicine vitamins	the manufacturer cannot guarantee the nutritional value of the product after this date	dispose of this product on this date
Pack Date	Open "packed on 12/15/2013" Closed: "22:5214125"	canned foods crackers cookies spices	this is the date the food was packaged Purpose is to assist retailer with First in First Out	Has a very long shelf life. Refer to individual product chart
Use by Date (also called a Quality Date)	"best if used by 12/15/2013" "use before 12/15/2013" (do not confuse with "expiration" dates that state "do not use after"	crackers cookies cereal soda salad mixes beverages	this is the manufacturer's recommendation for when the food will be at peak quality	Let your senses of sight, taste and smell guide you.
Sell by Date (also called a Pull by Date)	"sell by 12/15/2013" "pull by 12/15/2013"	dairy	CT Law determines dating for dairy products. Stores cannot sell this product after the date.	If the food has been properly handled it is safe to eat for days/weeks beyond date, refer to product chart.



Dairy



		Fridge Life after Code Date	Frozen Life after Code Date
cheese	shredded, high moisture (mozz)	21 days	6 months
	Shredded, low moisture (cheddar)	30 days	6-8 months
	chunk, high moisture	14 days	6 months
	string	14 days	6 months
	sliced, low moisture	14 days	6 months
	hard	6 months	6-8 months
	processed	30 days	6 months
margarine		6 months	12 months
cream cheese		2 months	not recommended
eggbeaters/whites		10 days	1 year
yogurt		14 days	1-2 months
cottage/ricotta cheese		14 days	not recommended
sour cream		14 days	not recommended
butter		2 months	1 year
milk		5 days	not recommended
buttermilk		10 days	not recommended
cream	half half	3 days	4 months
	heavy	10 days	3-4 months
	light	7 days	3-4 months
eggs		28 days	not recommended
juice		21 days	8-12 months
yeast		2 years	7-10 years
Ice cream		na	4 months

**suggested dates days PAST code date, assumes product has not been opened and has been kept in the cold chain under 40 degrees*

How to tell if milk is bad Although not a perfect test, your senses are usually the most reliable instruments to tell if your drink has gone bad. Some common traits of bad milk are discoloration, lumpy texture and a very distinctive unclean sour smell (which you will notice when removing the lid) from lactic acid producing bacteria.

Extending the Shelf Life of Milk:

- Skim and non-fat milks tend to last a few days longer than regular because some bacteria will develop more slowly in them.
- Chemical preservatives are not permitted in any milk products.
- Some states do not regulate milk expiration at all.
- The National Dairy Council says properly refrigerated milk usually can be kept for a few days past its “sell by” date but also notes that some milk processors guarantee their products for longer periods.
- **Keeping milk cold is critical** to maximizing its shelf life.
- Store milk on an interior refrigerator shelf rather than in the door, where the temperature fluctuates with frequent opening.

How to Tell if Eggs are Bad

In determining **how long eggs last**, many people use the *egg float test*. Although it is not 100% accurate, it allows you to tell if an egg is bad without cracking the shell. If you wonder if your egg has gone bad, simply submerge it in water to test if the egg has expired. A good egg will sink to the bottom and stay there on its side. An egg that stands with its larger side up is older, but the egg is still good. If the egg floats or hovers, then bacteria has broken down proteins in the egg whites and created gasses, an indication that the egg is probably unsafe to eat. This quick test may result in a false negative, but we believe it is better safe than sorry and any egg that fails this test should be thrown out.

How Long is Yogurt Good for?

Of course, yogurt lasts for a shorter period of time if it is not stored properly. But remember, like a lot of other dairy products, it usually has a sell by date which is simply the last date until which a manufacturer will vouch for a *product's quality, not its safety*. All yogurt manufactures that we checked guarantee their product quality for 7 days beyond the printed sell by date, but do not state a timeframe for safety (although they agree yogurt can be eaten beyond the 7 days). Because of this distinction, you may safely use it to compliment your favorite meals even after its printed date has lapsed.

How do I know if Cheese is bad?

In general, the harder the cheese the longer it keeps. Of course, it lasts for a shorter period of time if it is not stored properly. But remember, cheese, like a lot of other dairy products, usually has a sell by date or a best by date which is simply the last date by which a manufacturer will vouch for a product's *quality, not its safety*. Because of this distinction, you may safely use cheese to compliment your favorite meals even after its best by date has lapsed.

Your senses are usually the most reliable instruments to tell if your its gone bad. Some common traits of cheese going bad are a darker color and harder texture accompanied by a stronger smell. Your cheese has gone bad when you see or smell mold growth. Once mold is visible, you should throw away any of the softer cheeses. Likewise, if there is mold on some of your shredded cheese, the entire container should be thrown out. For firmer cheeses, if you cut away the mold and an inch of the cheese surrounding the mold it is still fine to cook with.



CANNED FOOD

Shelf Life after Code Date		
beans		3 years
Fish: Tuna, salmon Sardines		3 years
crab		6 months
frosting		10 months
High Acid Food	fruit	1-2 years
	pickles, sauerkraut	1-2 years
	tomato based	1-2 years
Low Acid Food	gravy	2-3 years
	soup	2-3 years
	cream sauce	2-3 years
	vegetables	2-3 years
meat	poultry, beef	2-3 years
pie filling		3 years

Do Not Consume if Food from Cans or Jars :

- Leaking or staining
- Swollen can
- Rusty
- Badly dented, crimped or pinched so that there are sharp spots
- Container is cracked
- Foul odor or change of color
- Safety seals are broken or missing
- Lids are loose or missing

Rotate Your Canned Storage:

Always use older products before newer ones.



Condiments

Shelf Life after Code Date		
BBQ Sauce	bottled	1 year
Honey	pasteurized	forever
jam, jelly, preserves		18 months
Ketchup		18 months
molasses		2 years
olives		18-24 months
salad dressing	bottled	1 year
salad dressing	dry mix	2 years
gravy	dry mix	2 years
salsa		12-18 months
Spaghetti Sauce	canned or jarred	18 months

Mayonnaise

Mayonnaise will begin to look a little more yellow instead of its normal creamy white color and then will get thicker and lumpy over time as it ages. Always discard the entire container if any mold (mould) is visible. With mayonnaise the advice is – when in doubt, throw it out! There are health risks associated with consuming bad or spoiled mayonnaise.

Honey

Did you know that honey lasts forever? It may crystallize with time, but it's one of nature's most perfect foods, and great for home storage.



Dry Goods



		Shelf Life after Opening		Extension
Pancake	baking mix	9 months		5 years stored
Brownie, Cake	Mix	12-18 months		5 years stored
baking powder		18 months		5 years stored
baking soda		indefinite		indefinite
beans	dry	1 year		30 years stored
bouillon		12-24 months		5 years stored
bread	commercially prepared	3-5 days		3 months frozen
cakes	commercially prepared	2-4 days		several months frozen
cereal	hot or cold	1 year		1-2 years stored
cookies		4 months		several months frozen
cornmeal		1 year		2+ years frozen
crackers		8 months		1-2 years stored
flour	white	1 year		5 years stored
	whole wheat	3 months		5 years stored
fruit	dried	6 months		5 years stored
macaroni and cheese		9-12 months		
nuts	out of shell	6-24 months		
	in shell	6-12 months		
oatmeal	quick rolled	12 months		30 years stored
	regular	12 months		30 years stored
oil	olive, veg, salad	6 months		
pasta		2-3 years		30 years stored
peanut butter		18 months		4 years stored
popcorn	kernels	2 years		5 years stored
	microwave	1 year		
potatoes	instant flakes	1 year		7 years stored
rice	brown	1 year		5 years frozen
	white	2 years		30 years stored
	mixes	6 months		
Shortening	vegetable	8-12 months		
spices	whole	4 years		*loses flavor but safe

	ground	2 years	*loses flavor but safe
Stuffing Mix		9-12 months	
sugar	brown	18 months	indefinite
	confectioners	18 months	indefinite
	white	2+ years	indefinite
	substitute	2 years	indefinite
toaster pastries	w fruit	6 months	
	w/o fruit	9 months	
tortillas		3 months	6 months frozen
wheat	hard or red	2-4 years	30 years stored

Do Not Consume Food from Boxes IF:

- The inside bag is torn or leaking
- The box has no inside bag and it is open or torn
- The box has no inside bag and it is stained or wet

Extending the Life of Dry Products:

Most dry products can be stored for a VERY long time if they are in an air tight container and kept at room temperature or frozen. However, once the seal is broken, the clock starts ticking as an opened product.



Beverages

		Shelf Life after Opening		Extension
Cocoa Mix		36 months		15 years stored
Coffee Creamer	liquid	9-12 months		
	powdered	2 years		
Coffee	ground	2 years		2+ years frozen
	instant	1-2 years		
Instant Breakfast		6 months		
Juice	bottle	9 months		
	box	4-6 months		
	canned	18 months		
milk	evaporated	1 year		
	non-fat dry	1 year		20 years stored
	shelf stable UHT	6 months		
	sweetened condensed	1 year		
tea	rice	6 months		
	soy	6 months		
	bagged	18 months		
tea	instant	3 years		
	loose leaf	2 years		
water		indefinite		indefinite
Nutritional supplements	Boost, Ensure etc.	Expiration date		Expiration date

* Many dry goods stored in air tight, room temperature will store for much longer until opened

How do I know when juice is bad?

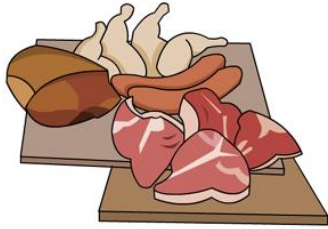
Some common traits of bad juice are a discoloration, a sour smell (don't drink it!) and finally the growth of mold (way too late). The sour smell is usually the first indication, if the juice smells sour it will taste sour. When micro-organisms in air enter the juice container they begin to ferment the fruit which changes the flavor and the aroma of the juice. This process may even cause the container to swell and possibly burst. So, if your juice begins to smell like vinegar, wine, beer, or alcohol be sure to discard it.



FROZEN

From Time Purchased FROZEN		
bread, bagels		3 months
chicken nuggets		2 months
desserts	baked	3-4 months
	cream pies	1-2 months
	fruit pies	6-8 months
dinners	w pork	3-4 months
	w beef, poultry, fish	6 months
dough	bread	1 month
	cookie	3 months
fish	breaded	4-6 months
juice	concentrate	2 years
soy meat substitutes		12-18 months
vegetables		8 months
waffles, pancakes		2 months
whipped topping		6 months
Ice cream		4 months

*when kept frozen there is no safety concern, but food may begin to lose taste and nutritional value



MEAT

		From code date when FRESH	From code date when FROZEN
fish- raw	salmon, mackerel	2 days	3-6 months
	cod, flounder, sole	2 days	12 months
	haddock, polluck	2 days	12 months
Fish- cooked		5-7 days	3-6 months
shrimp	raw	2 days	9 months
crab	legs	3-5 days	not recommended
oysters	shucked	1-2 days	3-4 months
lobster tails	raw	4-5 days	6-9 months
scallops	raw	1-2 days	3-6 months
beef	roast	3-5 days	1 year
	steak	3-5 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
pork	roast	3-5 days	1 year
	chops	3-5 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
lamb	roast	3-5 days	1 year
	steak/chops	3-5 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
poultry	whole cuts	2 days	1 year
	ground	2 days	9-12 months
bacon	unopened	2 weeks	6 months
	opened	1 week	2 months
chicken	fried	4 days	4 months
ham	unopened	2 weeks	1 year
	opened	1 week	1-2 months
hot dogs	unopened	2 weeks	9 months
lunch meats	deli or opened	3-5 days	not recommended
	unopened	2 weeks	1-2 months
pepperoni salami		1 month	6 months
sausage	raw	2 days	6 months
	smoked	1 week	9 months

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