



Product Dating and Shelf Life Guidelines

Product dating on food labels is provided by the manufacturer to indicate peak freshness and quality. Product dating was never intended to serve as an indicator of food safety. In fact, most foods, when kept in optimal storage conditions, are safe to consume and maintain an acceptable level of quality well past the label date. This document provides recommended guidelines for the review and interpretation of product dating on food labels and guidance on shelf life of a variety of products. It should not be used to evaluate the relative safety of the product.

Types of Dates as Seen on Packaged Food Products

Expiration Date or Use-By Date for baby formula – DO NOT USE BEYOND THIS DATE	This is the last date the product should be used before loss of quality, but it is still safe to eat. Federal regulations require a “use by” date on the product label of infant formula under FDA inspection. If used by that date, the formula must contain not less than the quantity of each nutrient as described on the label. Formula must maintain an acceptable quality to pass through an ordinary bottle nipple. If stored too long, formula can separate and clog the nipple. All baby formula with an expiration date should be discarded upon the expiration or use-by date.
Sell-By	The last date the food should be sold. This date tells the store how long to display the product for sale.
Best if Used By Best By Best Quality Date (or Before) for all Food Products INCLUDING Baby Food	Recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date. For baby food, if the manufacturer has identified a “best by” date – the food can be consumed beyond that date, based on the manufacturer’s recommendations. It does not need to be discarded by the date – follow product inspection guidelines for best quality.
Use-By	The last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product. After this date, the quality of the product goes down, but the product is still safe to eat.
Closed or Coded Dates	A code that consists of a series of letters and/or numbers applied by manufacturers to identify the date and time of production.
Pack Date	The date of manufacturing, processing, or final packaging used for manufacturers and retailers to track inventory, rotate items and locate items in case of a product recall. Generally not intended for consumers.

The Product Dating and Shelf Life Guidelines should be used as a guidance to provide an approximation of shelf life after the code date. Always visibly inspect food products prior to use. Do not consume if:

- Container is leaking or staining
- Container or can is swollen
- Can is rusty and perforated, or nearly perforated Container is cracked or punctured
- Badly dented, crimped or pinched edge or seam of can
- Food is exhibiting a foul odor or change of color
- Safety seals are missing or broken
- Lids are loose or missing
- Interior packaging of boxed item is torn or ripped
- Defects which provide evidence that the container has lost its hermetic seal: holes, fractures, punctures, product leakage, etc.
- Refer to the “Classification of Visible External Can Defects” as published by AOAC International in Cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration

Shelf Stable Food Items

Food items should be stored off the floor, either on a pallet or shelf. Storage area should be maintained clean, cool and dry. Extremely hot (over 100°F) and cold (below 30°F) temperatures can damage canned goods and shorten shelf life. Stock should always be rotated using the First Expired First Out (FEFO) methodology.

Shelf Stable Baby Food Items	Shelf Life After Code Date
Baby formula and cereal (for early stage development) must be destroyed upon the expiration date. Other baby food items for further development stages can use an extended date, with the understanding that the nutritional value of the product could be slightly reduced and not match the statement on the label.	
Cereal: dry mixes	Expiration date on package
Dry snacks, Puffs	Inspect for freshness beyond Best By Date
Food in jars, cans	Two months beyond date on package
Food in squeeze pouches	Two months beyond date on package
Formula	Expiration date on package
Juice	1 year
Canned (or Jar Packaged) Food	Shelf Life After Code Date
Beans	3 years
Fish: salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel	3 years
High-acid foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fruit (including applesauce, juices) ▪ Pickles, sauerkraut ▪ Baked beans w/mustard w/vinegar ▪ Tomatoes, tomato-based soups & sauces 	1 – 2 years
Low-acid foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gravy, soups/broths that aren't tomato based ▪ Pasta, stew, cream sauces ▪ Vegetables (not tomatoes) 	2-3 years
Meat: beef, chicken, pork, turkey	2-3 years
Pie filling	3 years
Aseptically-Packaged Products (Pouch Packaging)	Shelf Life After Code Date
UHT Milk	1 year
Broth: beef, chicken or vegetable	3 years
Soup	3 years
Freeze Dried Foods	Indefinitely
Fruits; pouch, bag, cup	3 years
Meat; fish, tuna, beef, chicken	2-3 years
Pastes; tomato, anchovy	1-2 years
Vegetables; pouch, bag, cup	3 years
Condiments, Sauces, Syrups	Shelf Life After Code Date
Barbeque Sauce (bottled)	1 year
Broth; beef, chicken (liquid or paste)	1 year
Frosting, plastic tub	12-18 months
Gravy (dry mix envelopes)	2 years
Honey	2 years – remains safe after crystallization.
Jams, jellies, preserves	18 months
Ketchup, cocktail, or chili sauce: jar, bottle or packet	18 months
Mayonnaise: jar, bottle or packet	3-6 months
Olives	18-24 months
Pickles	1 year canned 2 years, jarred – discard if inside of lid is rusty upon opening
Salad dressings; bottled	1 year

Salsa: bottled	12-18 months
Spaghetti sauce, canned	18 months
Spaghetti sauce, jarred	18 months
Syrup, chocolate	2 years
Syrup, corn	2 years
Syrup, pancake	2 years
Vinegar	2 years
Worcestershire sauce	2 years
Dry Goods	Shelf Life After Code Date
Baking mix, pancake	9 months
Baking mixes (brownie, cake, muffin, pudding, etc.)	12-18 months
Baking powder	18 months
Baking soda	Indefinite if kept dry
Beans, dried	1 year
Bouillon: beef or chicken	12-24 months
Bouillon: vegetable	12-24 months
Bread, commercially prepared with preservatives (including rolls)	3-5 days at room temperature Longer if frozen
Bread, fresh from bakery without preservatives	2-4 days Longer if frozen
Cakes, commercially prepared	2-4 days at room temperature Several months frozen
Candy (all, including chocolate)	9 months, caramel 18 months, chocolate 36 months, hard candy
Casserole Mix	9-12 months
Cereal, cold	1 year
Cereal, hot	1 year
Chips; potato, tortilla, veggie	6 months
Cookies	4 months
Cookie Mix	12-18 months
Cornmeal	1-2 years Longer if frozen
Crackers	8 months Except graham crackers, 2 months
Flour, corn	9-12 months Longer if frozen
Flour; potato, rice, white all-purpose	6-8 months Longer if frozen
Flour, self-rising	4-6 months Longer if frozen
Flour, whole wheat	6 months Keeps longer is refrigerated or frozen
Fruit, dried	6 months
Jerky; animal and plant based	1 – 2 years
Macaroni and Cheese, mix	9-12 months
Masa flour	1 – 2 years
Muffin Mix	4-5 months
Nuts, out of shell	6-12 months, bagged 12-24 months, canned
Nuts, in shell	6-12 months
Oats; rolled/quick	2-3 years
Oatmeal; instant	1-2 years

Oil, olive, vegetable, salad	6 months
Pasta, dry (egg noodles)	2-3 years
Pasta, dry (no egg)	2-3 years
Pasta; chickpea, lentil (gluten free)	1-2 years
Peanut Butter	18 months
Popcorn, kernels	2 years
Popcorn, commercially popped and bagged	2-3 months
Popcorn, microwave packets	1 year
Potatoes, mashed, instant flakes	1 year
Pretzels	6-8 months
Rice, brown	1 year
Rice, white	2 years
Rice-based mixes	6 months
Shortening, vegetable	8-12 months
Spices	Up to 4 years, whole spices Up to 2 years, ground spices Spices lose their flavor over time
Stuffing mix	9-12 months
Sugar, brown (light or dark)	Indefinitely
Sugar, confectioners	Indefinitely
Sugar; white	Indefinitely
Sugar substitute	Indefinitely
Toaster pastries	6 months, fruit 9 months, no fruit
Taco shells	6-9 months
Tortillas; corn, flour	3 months, shelf or refrigerator 6-8 months, freezer
Shelf Stable Beverages	Shelf Life After Code Date
Carbonated beverages; soda, seltzer (canned, bottled)	3 – 6 months
Cocoa Mixes	36 months
Coffee creamer, liquid shelf stable	9-12 months
Coffee creamer, powdered	2 years
Coffee, ground	2 years
Coffee, instant	1-2 years
Coffee, whole bean	1 year, vacuum packed
Instant breakfast	6 months
Juice, bottle, shelf stable	9 months
Juice, box	4-6 months
Juice, canned	18 months
Juice concentrate, shelf stable	1 – 3 years
Milk, evaporated	1 year
Milk, non-fat dry	1 year
Milk, shelf stable UHT	6 months
Milk, sweetened condensed	1 year
Nutritional aid supplements (Boost, Ensure, etc.)	1 year
Plan based (soy, rice, coco nut)	6 months
Tea, bagged	18 months
Tea, instant	3 years
Tea, loose leaf	2 years
Water	Indefinite
Water, flavored	Indefinite

Refrigerated Food Items

Perishable food items must be stored at 41°F or below until distribution. Leave proper space in refrigeration unit for air circulation. Stock should always be rotated using the First In First Out (FIFO) methodology.

Dairy and Cooler Items	Refrigerated (40°F or below)	Frozen (0°F or below)
Beverage; Alternative (soy, rice, nut, oat)	7 days	Not recommended
Butter	2-3 months	1 year
Buttermilk	14 days	Freezes poorly
Cheese trays	2 weeks	Do not freeze
Cheese, Cottage	14 days	Freezes poorly
Cheese, Cream	14 days	Freezes poorly
Cheese, Deli sliced	3-4 weeks	6-8 months
Cheese, hard	6 months	6-8 months
Cheese, soft	1-2 weeks	6 months
Cheese, processed sliced, shredded, string	3-4 weeks	6 months
Cheese, ricotta	7 days	Freezes poorly
Coffee creamer, dairy	3 weeks	Follow label instructions
Cream, Half & Half	5 days	4 months, use for cooking
Cream, Heavy	10 days	3-4 months, use for cooking
Cream, Light	1 week	3-4 months, use for cooking
Crust, pie or pizza ready to bake	Sell-by date	2 months
Deli or Lunch Meat, Retail Packed Only	90 Days	1 – 2 months
Dips, made with dairy, mayo, sour cream etc.	2 weeks	Do not freeze
Dough, biscuit	2 days	Do not freeze
Dough, bread or pizza	2 days	Do not freeze
Dough, cookie	7 days	2-3 months
Egg Nog	5 days	6 months
Eggs, hardboiled	1 week	Do not freeze
Eggs, in shell	4-5 weeks	Do not freeze
Eggs, pasteurized carton egg substitute	10 days	1 year
Eggs, pasteurized carton real eggs, unopened	10 days	1 year
Eggs, whites or yolks	2-4 days	12 months
Hummus	2-4 weeks	1-2 months
Juice, purchased refrigerated	3 weeks	8-12 months
Margarine	6 months	12 months
Milk	5 days	Can be frozen
Pasta, fresh	1-2 days	2 months
Pesto, jar/tub	1-3 weeks	6-8 months
Pico de gallo	3 days	Do not freeze
Pudding, purchased refrigerated	1 week	Do not freeze
Salad greens, mixed greens, spinach leaves	5-7 days unopened	Do not freeze
Salad dressing, refrigerated	3 months	Do not freeze
Salsa, fresh	3 days	Do not freeze
Sauces, fresh – pesto, alfredo	7 days	Freezing not recommended
Sausage, raw or cooked	1-2 days	1-2 months
Sprouts	Expiration Date	Do not freeze
Sour cream	14 days	Freezes poorly
Tofu	1 week	6 months
Whipped Cream, aerosol	3-4 weeks	Do not freeze
Whipped topping, aerosol	3 months	Do not freeze
Whipped topping, non-dairy tub	2 weeks	14 months

Yogurt; dairy-based	10-14 days	1-2 months
Yogurt; plant-based	10-14 days	1-2 months
Yogurt; drinks, pouches	10-14 days	1-2 months

Produce – Cut Varieties

Shelf-life for fresh cut varies depending on the commodity and product. Proper storage temperatures for cut produce must be met at $\leq 41^{\circ}\text{F}$.

Cut Produce Cooler Items	Refrigerated ($\leq 40^{\circ}\text{F}$)
Apples, wedged	10 – 14 days
Berries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries	2 – 9 days
Broccoli, florets, stems	10 – 14 days
Cabbage, shredded	10 – 14 days
Carrots, baby	Over 21 days
Carrots, sticks	10 – 14 days
Cauliflower, florets	10 – 14 days
Celery, sticks	10 – 14 days
Citrus, segmented	2 – 9 days
Cucumbers, sliced	4 – 9 days
Garlic, peeled	Over 21 days
Grapes	2 – 9 days
Jicama, sticks	4 – 9 days
Kiwi, sliced	2 – 9 days
Lettuce, whole heads	10 – 14 days
Lettuce salads, whole leaves, small leaf mixes	5-7 days
Mango, cubed sliced	2 – 9 days
Melon, cubed, sliced	2 – 9 days
Mushrooms, sliced	4 – 9 days
Onions; sweet, red, yellow, pearl	5 - 7 days
Peaches, sliced	2 – 9 days
Pears, sliced	2 – 9 days
Peppers, diced, sliced	4 – 9 days
Pineapple, chunk, diced, sliced	10 – 14 days
Pomegranate, arils	10 – 14 days
Potatoes, peeled	14 – 18 days
Root mixtures	14 – 18 days
Spinach, leaves	5-7 days
Squash, cubed, sliced	4 – 9 days
Strawberries, sliced	2 – 9 days
Tomatoes, diced	4 – 9 days
Zucchini, cubed, sliced	4 – 9 days

Frozen Food

Once a perishable item is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires – foods kept frozen are safe indefinitely, though the quality slowly deteriorates over time. Frozen foods should be stored at 0°F or below to maintain proper shelf life and overall quality.

Items Purchased Frozen	Frozen (0°F or below)
Bacon	6 months
Bread, Bagels	3 months
Chicken, pieces	9 months
Chicken, whole	1 year
Chicken, nuggets/patties	2 months
Desserts, frozen baked goods	3-4 months
Desserts, frozen cream pies	1-2 months
Dinners: pies, casseroles, shrimp, ham, pork or sausage	3-4 months
Dinners: beef, turkey, chicken or fish	6 months
Dough, bread	1 month; longer storage inactivates yeast, weakens gluten
Dough, cookie	3 months
Eggs; pasteurized in cartons	1 year, purchased frozen, unopened, never thawed
Fish, breaded	4-6 months
Fish, finned, fatty; salmon, tuna	2-3 months
Fish, finned, lean; cod, halibut	6-8 months
Fish, finned, lean; pollock, perch, trout	4-8 months
Fruit, frozen	4-6 months
Ham, fresh, uncured, cooked	3-4 months
Ham, fresh, uncured, uncooked	6 months
Ham, cooked, store wrapped, vacuum packed	1-2 months
Hot dogs	9 months
Ice Pops	6 months
Ice Cream	6 months
Juice concentrate	2 years
Luncheon meat	1-2 months
Meat, ground beef, pork, poultry	6 months
Meat, beef, veal, lamb, pork; chops, roasts, steaks	4-12 months
Potato products; fries, hashbrowns	8-10 months
Prosciutto, Parma or Serrano ham, dry Italian salami	6 months
Sausage, raw or cooked	6 months
Shellfish; crab, lobster	2-4 months
Shellfish; shucked clams, oysters, mussels, scallops	3-4 months
Shellfish; shrimp	6-18 months
Soups and stews, vegetable or meat based	2-3 months
Soy meat substitutes	12-18 months
Vegetables, cut/diced	8-10 months
Waffles, pancakes	2 months
Whipped topping, non-dairy tub	6 months

Meat, Poultry, Wild Game & Fish

Meat, poultry and fish distributed through The Idaho Foodbank and partner agencies should be completely frozen, and stored at 0°F or below. Once such products are thawed, they should be prepared and eaten directly.

Meats, Fresh	Refrigerated (40°F or below)	Frozen (0°F or below)
Fish, finned, fatty; salmon, tuna	2 days	2-3 months
Fish, finned, lean; cod, halibut	2 days	6-8 months
Fish, finned, lean; pollock, perch, trout	2 days	4-8 months
Shellfish, shrimp; cooked (cocktail shrimp)	3-4 days	6-9 months
Shellfish, shrimp; raw	2 days	6-18 months
Crab, canned	6 months unopened; 5-7 days opened	Do not freeze
Crab, in the shell; whole, legs, claws	3-5 days	9-12 months
Shellfish, shucked; oysters, clams, mussels	1-2 days	3-4 months
Lobster Tails, raw	4-5 days	6-9 months
Scallops, raw	1-2 days	3-6 months
Fish/Seafood, Cooked		
Fish, finned, fatty: salmon, tuna	5-7 days	3-6 months
Fish, finned, lean; cod, halibut	5-7 days	3-6 months
Shellfish, shrimp; cooked (cocktail shrimp)	5-7 days	3-6 months
Meats, Raw		
Beef Roasts	3-5 days	1 year
Beef Steaks	3-5 days	1 year
Pork Roasts	3-5 days	1 year
Pork Chops	3-5 days	1 year
Lamb Roasts	3-5 days	1 year
Lamb steaks/Chops	3-5 days	1 year
Poultry: Chicken or Turkey, whole	2 days	1 year
Ground Meats (beef, pork, lamb, or poultry)	2 days	9-12 months
Meats, Processed		
Bacon, unopened	2 weeks	6 months
Bacon, deli or butcher block	1 week	6 months
Chicken, fried, deli	4 days	4 months
Ham, unopened	2 weeks	1 year
Hot Dogs, unopened	2 weeks	9 months
Luncheon Meats, deli sliced	3-5 days	6 months
Luncheon Meats, unopened commercial package	2 weeks	1-2 months
Pepperoni, salami	1 month	6 months
Pouch or container, cooked; beef, chicken, pork	7 days	6-8 month
Sausage, raw	2 days	6 months
Sausage, smokes links or patties	1 week	9 months
Wild Game		
Venison, Elk	3-5 days	3-4 months
Rabbit, Squirrel	1-2 days	6 months
Wild duck, pheasant, goose (whole)	1-2 days	6 months

Prepared Foods / Deli Foods

Prepared Items/Deli Foods	Refrigerated (41°F or below)	Frozen (0°F or below)
Chicken, Roasted or Fried	3-4 days	4-6 months
Deli Meat, retail packaged	Date on package	90 days
Guacamole	5-7 days	6 months
Hummus, Pasteurized	3 months	Do Not Freeze
Hummus, with Preservatives	2 months	Do Not Freeze
Hummus, traditional, no preservatives, not pasteurized	7 days	Do Not Freeze
Main dishes, meals	3-4 days	2-3 months
Meats in gravy or broth (including meat pies)	1-2 days	6 months
Pasta, fresh	1 week	1 month
Salads, prepared (macaroni, egg, potato, chicken, tuna, etc.)	3-5 days	Do Not Freeze
Sandwiches, Grab & Go, Retail packaged	2 days	Do Not Freeze
Sauces, Egg-Based (Hollandaise, etc.)	10 days	Do Not Freeze
Side dishes, cooked vegetables	3-4 days	1-2 months
Side dishes, potato-based (not salad)	3-4 days	1-2 months
Side dishes, rice	3-4 days	1-2 months
Soups, Stews	2-3 days	4-6 months

Guidelines for the Storage of Fresh Produce

- Most fruits and vegetables have the best quality when kept refrigerated.
- Leafy greens either whole or cut must always be stored under refrigeration at 41°F or below.
- All cut produce must be stored at 41°F or below, but too cold and it could cause damage. Fresh cut fruit has a shelf life of 2 – 9 days, depending on the commodity and product. Assuming proper storage temperatures, the most perishable fresh-cut items with a shelf life of only 2 to 9 days are strawberry slices, melon chunks, mango cubes, citrus segments, sliced kiwi, peaches or pears, and grape berries.
- Bananas should not be refrigerated, which will cause banana skin to blacken – but the fruit will not ripen. Bananas create their own CO₂ and will ripen faster if kept in a sealed bag. They can be frozen for use in smoothies and baked goods.
- Very fresh apples, mangoes and stone fruits can be stored at room temperature, but these items should be refrigerated as they ripen.
- Hardy vegetables such as onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash and garlic can be stored in cool, dark places outside of the cooler. Potatoes should not be exposed to direct sunlight.
- When deciding how best to store produce and improve shelf life, use how the produce department in the grocery store is set up as a guide.

Sources

1. "Shelf Life of Food Bank Products." 2012. Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
2. "Food Product Dating." December 2016. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.
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4. "Food Storage"; No. EC446; Albrecht, Julie A.; University of Nebraska;
5. "Safe Home Food Storage"; Van Laanen, Peggy; Texas A&M Extension Service; B-5031; May 1999.
6. "The Food Keeper – A Consumer Guide to Food Quality & Safe Handling." Food Marketing Institute.
7. "Classification of Visible External Can Defects". AOAC International in Cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration.
8. The Produce Blue Book. <https://www.producebluebook.com/wp-content/uploads/KYC/Fresh-Cut-Produce.pdf>
9. University of California Postharvest Center; <http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/>; http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/Commodity_Resources/Fact_Sheets/

Food Safety Resources

www.foodsafety.gov

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/food-safety/food-safety-resources>

<http://www.fightbac.org/free-resources/>

<https://www.statefoodsafety.com/Resources>

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/HealthCareProfessionals/default.htm>

<https://www.fmi.org/food-safety/food-safety-resources>