



Expiration Date: This is the date the manufacturer recommends the product be used by for best quality (flavor, color, texture). If stored properly, items remain safe and wholesome. However, flavor, color, and texture may change slowly.

Pull or Sell By Date: The manufacturer recommends this be the last day the product be sold in a retail store. The product will remain safe and wholesome for a reasonable amount of time for use after purchase. The amount of time depends on the product type and storage conditions.



Freezing: Many products can be frozen to extend the acceptable storage time. Freezing a product holds it in its present state. Bacteria cannot grow in the freezer. However, freezing will not kill bacteria if it is already present.

Code Date: Manufacturers may stamp numbers on products so they know when and where they were produced. This is helpful if there is a recall and foods need to be taken off the shelf.

Manufacturing or Packing Date: Product may be stamped with a date preceded by "MFG." This date can be used along with recommended shelf life for guidance on how long a product will have its best flavor and quality.

Best If Used By Date: This is the date by which the product is at its highest quality, but can still be safely consumed for a period of time after the date. The length of time is dependent on the product and its storage.

Is This Food Still Good?

Basic guide to package codes and dates

What do the numbers mean?

The codes and dates printed on food packages have different purposes. If a food appears to be "outdated" **it does NOT automatically mean the food is unsafe or unusable.**

The USDA states that "Best By" dates are intended to tell you how long the product will retain its best flavor or quality. **It is not a safety date.** Foods may be eaten after the date if they have been properly stored and handled.

WHAT ABOUT SHELF LIFE?

How long is each product consumable? Proper packaging and proper storage are essential no matter how long products are stored. Food that is in a sound container, stored at the proper temperature, and protected from moisture, pests, and other sources of contamination may experience a decrease in taste, color, or texture over time, yet remain safe. Note: Perishable food must be stored at 40F or lower.

***These are examples of guidelines based on products that are stored properly in sound containers.**

Product Type	Recommended Storage	Shelf Life (In Appropriate Container)
Canned Foods (metal can)	Store in a cool, dry location. Best storage facility temperature is between 50 and 70F. Temps over 80 degrees for long periods of time cause faster decline in color, texture, and flavor.	Refer to specific guidelines on how to identify unsafe cans. If the can is not damaged, most canned foods will be safe for years. Be sure to rotate stock by date.
Canned Foods (glass can)	Store in a cool, dry location. Exposure to light speeds changes in color. Some foods may separate. Moderate separation is okay.	For best quality, use within a year. Discard if product looks unappealing.
Boxed Dry Goods (cereal, crackers, etc.)	Store in cool, dry place with low humidity. These products are good as long as they are not contaminated and have not become too stale to taste good. (Note: Stale products are not unsafe.) Use within a year of the "Best by" date for best quality. Discard if food tastes stale.	
Pasta Products	Store in a cool, dry place with low humidity. Temperature is important: The NYS Dept of Agriculture and Markets recommends: If stored at 40 degrees F, use within 72 months (6 years), at 70 degrees, use within 36 months (3 years), at 90 degrees, use within 18 months (1 ½ years).	
Bread	Store in a cool place. Freeze close to sell-by date if longer storage is needed.	Use quickly. Watch for mold. Discard if moldy.
Dairy Products	Store in a refrigerator set between 32 and 39 degrees Fahrenheit. Many dairy products can also be frozen.	
*Milk	Milk usually stays "fresh" up to 6 or so days past the sell by date. Milk can be frozen near the sell by date for longer storage. If milk sours, discard or use in baking recipes that call for "buttermilk." (Sour milk is NOT unsafe.)	
*Cottage cheese, yogurt, sour cream, cream cheese	These "cultured" products have a longer shelf life than milk. If the container is unopened, good quality can be retained up to approximately 4-6 weeks past the sell by date. Discard if product looks unappealing.	
Infant Food or Formula	Store in a cool, dry place. Refer to local WIC Office for breastfeeding and/or formula assistance.	Infant products MUST be discarded if the use-by date has passed.

Sources: NYS Dept of Agriculture and Markets, USDA, CNY food bank nutrition resources. Brought to you in cooperation with the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program and