

How Safe is My Food?

What do packaging dates mean?

"**Sell by**" means the *store* should sell the product by the printed date, but the product still can be safely eaten by the consumer. "**Best if used by**" means the consumer should use the product by the date listed for best quality and flavor (not for safety reasons). "**Use by**" or "**Expires**" means the product *should* be used by consumers by the date listed; you are likely to see a marked deterioration in product quality and safety after that date.

The Real Shelf Life of Food Products

Today's practices of processing and adding preservatives to most foods commercially manufactured food significantly extends the life of food products. The following chart outlines the life of many basic foods. Always use your best judgment to determine the safety of consuming any foods, and remember "***If in doubt, throw it out***".

How Long Will it Last?

Shelf-Stable Foods	Unopened on Shelf	Opened, Refrigerated	Opened on Shelf
Baking ingredients			
Biscuit or pancake mix	15 months		Pkg. use-by date
Cake, brownie, and bread mixes	12-18 months		Pkg. use-by date
Flour, white	6-12 months		6-8 months
Cereal, ready-to-eat	6-12 months		3 months
Condiments			
Catsup, tomato; cocktail sauce or chili sauce	12 months	6 months	1 month
Mayonnaise, commercial	2-3 months	2 months	
Mustard	12 months	1 year	1-2 months
Olives (black and green)	12 -18 months	2 weeks	
Pickles	12 months	1-2 months	
Salad dressings (bottled)	10-12 months	3 months	
Honey	12 months		12 months
Jams, jellies, preserves	12 months	6 months	
Standards			
Canned Goods (low acid)	2-5 Years	depends on product	
Examples: meat, poultry, fish, gravy, stew, soups, beans, carrots, corn, pasta, peas, potatoes, spinach			
Canned Goods (high acid)	12-18 months	5-7 days	
Examples: juices, fruit, pickles, tomato, soup, and foods in vinegar-based sauce			
Juice, boxes	4-6 months	8-12 days	
Beans, dried	12 months	12 months	
Lentils, dried	12 months	12 months	
Milk, canned evaporated	12 months	4-5 days	
Pasta, dry	2 years		1 year
Peanut butter	6-9 months		2-3 months
Soup mixes	12 months		.
Rice, white or wild	2 years		1 year
Refrigerated Product			
	Refrigerated	Frozen	
Juice cartons, fruit drinks, punch	7-10 days open	8-12 months	
Sour cream, sc based dip	2 weeks	Doesn't freeze well	
Butter	1-3 months	6-9 months	
Cheese, hard (i.e.cheddar, Swiss)	6 mo.unopened; 3-4 weeks opened	6 months	
Cottage cheese, Ricotta	1 week	Doesn't freeze well	
Cream cheese	2 weeks	Doesn't freeze well	
Egg, substitutes, liquid	10 days unopened, 3 days opened	Manufacturer says "Do not freeze"	
Eggs, in shell	3-5 weeks	Do not freeze	
Milk	7 days	3 months	
Sour cream	7-21 days	Doesn't freeze well	
Yogurt	7-14 days	1-2 months	