

ASK THE EXPERT: EXPIRATION DATES

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What do the dates on food packages mean?

Dates found on meat, poultry and eggs show how long the stores can display the product and when the product has the best quality (taste and appearance). If handled safely, these products may still be safe to eat after that date.



There are 2 types of dates on packaged, shelf-stable foods. One is the date the product was manufactured and the other is a best-by, freeze-by, use-by, or sell-by date. These dates do NOT tell you when a food is safe to eat- that date is simply the last day that the product has the best taste/appearance.



A **Best-by** date guarantees when a product is of the best quality or flavor. For example, a package of crackers may be soft instead of crisp after this date. It's not about safety.

A **Sell-by** date is the date set by manufacturers to tell retailers when to remove a product from shelves. Milk usually lasts 5-7 days past this date before turning sour.

A **Freeze-by** date indicates when a product should be frozen to keep the best quality.

A **Use-by** date is the last date that guarantees the best quality of a product. This is also not a safety date except when used on infant formula.



A packaged or canned food is NOT safe to consume when

- the food spurts out of the can when opened.
- there are signs of mold or spoilage on the food.
- the food smells bad.
- the can is rusty, dented, or swollen.

Sources:

<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2013/06/27/you-toss-food-wait-check-it-out>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/food-product-dating/food-product-dating>

<https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/how-to-tell-whether-expired-food-is-safe-to-eat/>



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