

# GUIDELINES FOR PERISHABLE & NON-PERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS

Food Item	Storage Temperature	Shelf Life After Code Date	Discard If
<b>SHELF STABLE</b>			
canned goods (low acidity)*	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	3 years	rusted, bulging, severe dents, or will not stack
canned goods (high acidity)**	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	18 months	rusted, bulging, severe dents, or will not stack
dry beans, rice, pasta, ramen	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	2 years	opened or seal is broken
boxed/bagged goods - cereal, crackers, mixes, etc.	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	1 year	opened or seal is broken
sauces, condiments, dressings	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	1 year	opened or seal is broken
beverages	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	1 year	opened or seal is broken
chips	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	2 months	opened or seal is broken
mayonnaise/cream based items	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	3 months	opened or seal is broken
baby food/adult formula	store in well ventilated and climate controlled area	discard after date	popped safety seal, cracks, leaks
<b>FROZEN</b>			
all assorted meats/poultry	0° F or below	2 months	off odor, color, open package or freezer burn
fruit, vegetables	0° F or below	6 months	off odor or taste
ice cream	0° F or below	2 months	off odor or taste
<b>DAIRY/COOLER</b>			
juice	40° F	3 weeks	mold, fermentation, off odor or taste
milk (except Borden)	40° F	1 week (discard all Borden products after date)	off odor or taste
cheese	40° F or below	1 week (soft) 1 month (hard)	package is open
eggs	40° F or below	3 weeks	off odor, color or taste
yogurt, sour cream, dips	40° F (do not freeze)	2 weeks	mold, off odor or taste
salsa, pesto	40° F	discard after date	mold, off odor or taste
hummus	40° F	1 week	mold, off odor or taste
prepared dishes or meals	40° F	3 days	past date
salads	40° F	3 days	past date
<b>PRODUCE</b>			
packaged produce (bagged lettuce, etc.)	40° F	discard after date	mold, decay, fungus, insects, off color, odor or taste
cut produce	40° F	discard after date	mold, decay, fungus, insects, off color, odor or taste
bulk produce	refrigeration preferred	varies	mold, decay, fungus, insects, off color, odor or taste
<b>BREAD/PASTRY</b>			
fresh	keep in cool dry place	4 days	any visible mold
frozen	0° F or below	1 month	off odor or taste
containing cream	40° F or below	throw away if not kept refrigerated/frozen	past date

\*Examples of Low Acidity Canned Goods: canned meat and poultry, soups (except tomato) and stews, pasta products, potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, peas, beets, beans, pumpkin

\*\*Examples of High Acidity Canned Goods: tomato products, fruits, sauerkraut, foods in vinegar-based sauces or dressings

## DECODING THE FRESHNESS DATES

### Baked goods, cereal, snacks and some baked goods:

Phrases such as “Best Before,” “Best if Used Before,” or “Best if Used By” tell you how long the product will retain its best flavor and quality. They are found on products like baked goods, cereals, snacks, and some canned foods. The food is still safe to eat after this date, but it might have become stale or changed somewhat in flavor or texture.

### Yogurt, eggs and other items that require refrigeration:

The “Expiration,” “Use By,” or “Use Before” date, which appears on yogurt, eggs, and other food that requires refrigeration, goes a bit further. A product past its expiration date should be used within the guidelines of storage stated in the Food Keeper - A Consumer Guide to Food Quality and Safe Handling. When “Expires” or “Use By” appears on items like yeast or refrigerated dough, it indicates how long the product will retain its rising power.

### Highly perishable with a particular shelf life like meat, milk & bread:

The “Sell-by” date, often referred to as the “Pull” date by manufacturers, is usually found on highly perishable foods with a short shelf life, like meat, milk and bread. It indicates the last day the item should appear on a supermarket shelf. When refrigerated at 40° F or below most foods will remain safe to eat about five days past the “Sell-by” date. However, you should pay special attention to meats. Fresh meat and pork keep no more than 3-5 days in the refrigerator, while fresh poultry, seafood and ground or chopped meat should be used within a day or 2 of purchase. Many highly perishable items can be frozen on or before the “Sell-by” date. Please refer to the Food Keeper - A Consumer Guide to Food Quality and Safe Handling for storage length guidelines of frozen items.

Note: Although stores should pull a product after the “Sell-by” date, it remains legal to sell the food as long as it is safe to eat.

### “Pack,” “Closed” or “Coded” dates not intended for consumers:

Other types of dates, known as “Pack,” “Closed,” or “Coded” dates, represent the date on which a food was packaged or processed for sale. Pack dates are not intended for consumers but rather are used by manufacturers and retailers, in tandem with lot numbers, to track inventory, rotate food on shelves, and locate items in case of recall. **Since dates are printed at the manufacturer’s discretion, their meanings may differ for each product line. You can not decipher all manufacturer codes.**

## FROZEN FOOD HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

Thawing can be done in four ways:

1. In a refrigerator at 40° F. Place food in a pan to catch drips.
2. Under COLD running water or immersed in cold water. Food should be wrapped tightly in plastic. DO NOT thaw at room temperature for more than two hours.
3. In a microwave oven, but only in small quantities and if cooked immediately after thawing.
4. As part of the cooking process. Stir while cooking.

COOK OR EAT AS SOON AS THAWED. ALWAYS INSPECT FOOD BEFORE AND AFTER IT HAS BEEN THAWED. IF IT SMELLS BAD OR IS DISCOLORED, DISCARD IMMEDIATELY.

**IF IN DOUBT THROW IT OUT.**

For more information or questions contact the USDA’s Meat and Poultry Hotline: **1-800-535-4555** or [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

## LABELING REQUIREMENTS

The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and the Fair Labeling and Packaging Act require specific information to be on products prior to distribution.

### Food label products must contain:

- » The common name of the product on the principal display panel
- » The name and place of business of the manufacturer, packer or distributor
- » The net quantity of the contents on the principal display panel
- » The common or usual name of each ingredient, listed in descending order of prominence



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