

Food Storage and Shelf Life Guidelines

Food Dates are NOT Required

The Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture **do not** mandate that foods are date labeled. The only exception is infant formula. Infant food and formula is required to carry an expiration date to ensure nutrient value has not deteriorated.

Any dates placed on food are because of STATE Law or the discretion of the manufacturer.

States can regulate date labels in any way they desire and there are extreme variations among the fifty states.

Connecticut Law requires date labeling on dairy products only. The law reads as follows: *Each person, handler, firm or corporation shall clearly mark each container of milk or milk product, yogurt, cream cheese, cottage cheese, ricotta cheese, soft cheese, eggnog or sour cream offered for retail sale with a **last sale date**. In accordance with the provisions of chapter 54, the Milk Regulation Board shall adopt regulations establishing standards and criteria for label type size, color and wording that is consistent with national standards and said board may incorporate by reference the Nutritional Education and Labeling Act, 21 CFR 101*

Every case, carton, or container of shell eggs may, but need not have legibly printed thereon...a date by which the eggs must be sold, which shall be referred to in these rules as the "sell by date". The sell-by date shall be no more than 30 days after the pack date. It shall be stated in months and day using the three letter abbreviation of the month followed by the numerical day of the month and preceded by the term SELL BY or EXP. No shell eggs may be offered for sale or sold to a consumer or restaurant more than 45 days after the pack date.

Food Dates are Not for Safety

The FDA allows manufacturers to stamp their product with a date in order to help the seller determine how long to keep the product on display and to help the consumer use the product when it is of best quality. **The date is in no way intended to be a food safety date.** The only regulation is that if a manufacturer **chooses** to use a date on their product, then the FDA allows either coded letters and numbers ("closed dating") to be used on shelf-stable products or if a calendar date is chosen ("open dating") then the FDA requires that it contain the month, day and year along with a phrase explaining the meaning of that date.

Definitions of Common Code Dates:

| Date | Examples | May be found on | What it Means | When to Dispose |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Expiration Date | <p>"expires 12/15/2013"</p> <p>"do not use after 12/15/2013"</p> | <p>baby food</p> <p>baby formula</p> <p>nutritional supp.</p> <p>medicine</p> <p>vitamins</p> | <p>the manufacturer cannot guarantee the nutritional value of the product after this date</p> | <p>dispose of this product on this date</p> |
| Pack Date | <p>Open "packed on 12/15/2013"</p> <p>Closed: "22:5214125"</p> | <p>canned foods</p> <p>crackers</p> <p>cookies</p> <p>spices</p> | <p>this is the date the food was packaged Purpose is to assist retailer with First in First Out</p> | <p>Has a very long shelf life. Refer to individual product chart</p> |
| Use by Date (also called a Quality Date) | <p>"best if used by 12/15/2013"</p> <p>"use before 12/15/2013"</p> <p>(do not confuse with "expiration" dates that state</p> <p>"do not use after"</p> | <p>crackers</p> <p>cookies</p> <p>cereal</p> <p>soda</p> <p>salad mixes</p> <p>beverages</p> | <p>this is the manufacturer's recommendation for when the food will be at peak quality</p> | <p>Let your senses of sight, taste and smell guide you.</p> |
| Sell by Date (also called a Pull by Date) | <p>"sell by 12/15/2013"</p> <p>"pull by 12/15/2013"</p> | <p>dairy</p> | <p>CT Law determines dating for dairy products. Stores cannot sell this product after the date.</p> | <p>If the food has been properly handled it is safe to eat for days/weeks beyond date, refer to product chart.</p> |

Shelf-Stable Product

Most shelf-stable or 'dry' foods (cans, boxes, bags) remain edible for several days, months, or even years past their code date. Always examine the packaging to make sure it has not been damaged too much so that the food is no longer safe to eat.

Do Not Consume Food from Cans or Jars If:

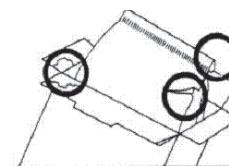
- Leaking or stained
- Swollen can
- Rusty
- Badly dented, crimped or pinched
- Container is cracked
- Foul odor
- Safety seals are broken or missing
- Lids are loose or missing
- Foods exhibit changed color or odor—**never taste suspicious foods!**



Do Not Consume Food from Boxes If:

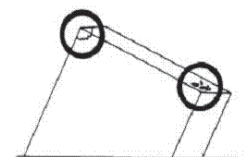
Inside bag:

- Is torn or leaking
- Has moldy or foreign objects inside
- Seals are ripped



Box without an inside bag:

- Is open or torn
- Has live or dead insects, webs, or droppings
- Is stained or wet



Tips on Storing Canned and Boxed Food:

- ✓ Store cans and boxes off the floor, either on a pallet or shelf and 18 inches away from the wall so air can circulate.
- ✓ Store canned and boxed goods in a clean, dry, and cool area (below 85°F).
- ✓ Extremely hot (over 100°F) and cold (below 30°F) temperatures can damage canned goods and shorten shelf life.
- ✓ Always rotate your stock—First in-First out! Distribute or use older products before newer ones.

| Shelf-Stable Foods | Shelf Life After Code Date |
|--|---|
| Baby Food | |
| Cereal: dry mixes | Expiration date on package |
| Food in jars, cans | Expiration date on package |
| Formula | Expiration date on package |
| Juice | 1 year |
| Canned Foods | |
| Beans | 3 years |
| Fish: salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel | 3 years |
| Frosting, canned | 10 months |
| High-acid foods • fruit (including applesauce, juices) • pickles, sauerkraut • baked beans w/ mustard/ vinegar • tomatoes, tomato-based soups & sauces | 1-2 years |
| Low-acid foods • gravy, soups/ broths that aren't tomato-based • pasta, stews, cream sauces • vegetables (not tomatoes) | 2-3 years |
| Meat: beef, chicken, pork, turkey | 2-3 years |
| Pie filling | 3 years |
| Aseptically-packaged Products | |
| UHT Milk | 1 year |
| Broth: beef, chicken, or vegetable | 3 years |
| Soup | 3 years |
| Fruits | 3 years |
| Vegetables | 3 years |
| Condiments, Sauces, Syrups | |
| Barbecue sauce (bottled) | 1 year |
| Frosting, canned | 10 months |
| Gravy (dry mix envelopes) | 2 years |
| Honey | 2 years--remains safe after crystallization. To use, simply immerse closed container in hot (not boiling) water until honey liquefies |
| Jams, jellies, preserves | 18 months |
| Ketchup, cocktail, or chili sauce: jar, bottle, or packet | 18 months |
| Mayonnaise: jar, bottle, or packet | 3-6 months |
| Molasses | 2 years |
| Mustard: jar, bottle, or packet | 2 years |
| 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 |

| Shelf-Stable Foods (Continued) | Shelf Life After Code Date |
|--|--|
| Condiments, Sauces, Syrups (Continued) | |
| 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 | |
| Baking mix, pancake | 9 months |
| Baking mixes (brownie, cake, muffin, 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 (including rolls) | 3-5 days at room temp 3 months stored frozen |
| Cakes, commercially prepared | 2-4 days at room temp 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 |
| Cookies | 4 months |
| Cornmeal | 1 year at room temp 2+ years frozen |
| Crackers | 8 months except graham crackers, 2 months |
| Flour, white (all purpose or cake) | 1 year |
| Flour, whole wheat | 6 months keeps longer if refrigerated or frozen |
| Fruit, dried | 6 months |
| Macaroni and Cheese, mix | 9-12 months |
| Nuts, out of shell | 6-12 months, bagged 12-24 months, canned |
| Nuts, in shell | 6-12 months |
| Oatmeal | 12 months |
| Oil, olive, vegetable, salad | 6 months |
| Pasta, dry (egg noodles) | 2-3 years |
| Pasta, dry (no egg) | 2-3 years |

| Shelf-Stable Foods (Continued) | Shelf Life After Code Date |
|---|---|
| Dry Goods (Continued) | |
| Peanut butter | 18 months |
| Popcorn, kernels | 2 years |
| Popcorn, commercially popped and bagged | 2-3 months |
| Popcorn, microwave packets | 1 year |
| Potato chips | 2 months |
| Potatoes, mashed, instant flakes | 1 year |
| Pretzels | 6-8 months |
| Pudding, prepared/ shelf stable | 1 week |
| 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 flavor over time but remain safe to use indefinitely |
| Stuffing mix | 9-12 months |
| Sugar, brown (light or dark) | 18 months |
| Sugar, confectioners | 18 months |
| Sugar, white | 2+ years |
| Sugar substitute | 2 years |
| Toaster pastries | 6 months, fruit 9 months, no fruit |
| Tortillas | 3 months, shelf or refrigerator 6 months, freezer Do not use if they develop mold or harden |

The following information applies only to shelf-stable beverages. Juices and milk products requiring refrigeration are covered in the next section, along with other refrigerated items.

| Shelf-Stable Beverages | Shelf Life After Code Date |
|---|---|
| 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 | |
| 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 |
| Rice milk, shelf stable | 6 months |
| Carbonated beverages (soda/ seltzer water) | 3 months, bottles (all) |
| | 3 months, diet (cans) |
| | 9 months, regular soda or seltzer (cans) |
| Soymilk, shelf stable | 6 months |
| Tea, bagged | 18 months |
| Tea, instant | 3 years |
| Tea, loose leaf | 2 years |
| Water | indefinite; store in a cool, dark place away from chemicals |
| Water, flavored | indefinite; store in a cool, dark place away from chemicals |

Tips on Storing Refrigerated Food:

- ✓ Keep all chilled food refrigerated at 40° F or below until distribution.
- ✓ Store eggs in their original carton.
- ✓ Leave space for air to circulate between items in the refrigerator.
- ✓ Rotate stock so that older foods are distributed first.



| Dairy and Cooler Items | Refrigerated (40°F or below) | Frozen (0°F or below) |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Butter | 2-3 months | 1 year |
| Buttermilk | 10-14 days | Freezes poorly |
| Cheese trays | 2 weeks | Do not freeze |
| Cheese, Cottage | 10-15 days | Freezes poorly |
| Cheese, Cream | 2 weeks | Freezes poorly |
| Cheese, hard | 6 months | 6-8 months |
| Cheese, soft | 1-2 weeks | 6 months |
| Cheese, processed | 3-4 weeks | 6 months |
| Coffee creamer, liquid refrigerated | 3 weeks | Follow instructions on package |
| Cream, Half & Half | 3-4 days | 4 months; use for cooking |
| Cream, Heavy | 10 days | 3-4 months; shake upon thawing to loosen; 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 |
| Dips, made with sour cream | 2 weeks | Do not freeze |
| Dough, biscuit | Sell-by date | Do not freeze |
| Dough, bread or pizza | Sell-by date | Do not freeze |
| Dough, cookie | Sell-by date | 2-3 months |
| Eggs, in shell | 4-5 weeks | Do not freeze |
| Eggs, pasteurized carton egg substitute, unopened | 10 days | 1 year |
| Eggs, pasteurized carton real eggs, unopened | 10 days | 1 year |
| Juice, purchased refrigerated | 3 weeks | 8-12 months |
| Margarine | 6 months | 12 months |
| Milk (not shelf stable) | 1 week | 1-3 months; use for cooking |
| Pudding, purchased refrigerated | 1-2 days | Do not freeze |
| Salad dressing, refrigerated packets | 3 months | Do not freeze |
| Sour cream | 2-3 weeks | Do not freeze |
| 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; do not refreeze once thawed |
| Yogurt | 10-14 days | 1-2 months |

Tips on Storing Frozen Food:

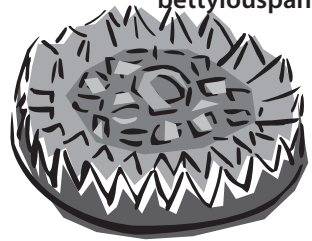
- ✓ If food remains continuously frozen, it will last much longer than if it is exposed to changing temperatures. Keep all frozen food at 0° F or below until distribution.
- ✓ Leave meat, poultry, and seafood in the original packaging when distributing. It is unsafe to open and repack these foods.



| Items Purchased Frozen | Frozen (0°F or below) |
|--|---|
| Bread, Bagels | 3 months |
| Chicken, nuggets/ patties | 2 months |
| Desserts, frozen baked goods | 3-4 months |
| Desserts, frozen cream pies | 1-2 months |
| Desserts, frozen fruit pies | 6-8 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 |
| Pasteurized eggs in cartons | 1 year, purchased frozen, unopened, never thawed |
| Fish, Breaded | 4-6 months |
| Ice Pops | 6 months |
| Fruit, frozen | 4 months |
| Ice cream | 2-4 months |
| Juice concentrate | 2 years |
| Soy meat substitutes | 12-18 months |
| Vegetables | 8 months |
| Waffles, pancakes | 2 months |
| Whipped topping, non-dairy tub | 6 months |

Meats distributed through Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank should be completely frozen, and stored at 0°F or lower for as long as possible before distribution. Do not leave meats at room temperature unnecessarily!

| Meats, Fresh | Refrigerated (40°F or below) | Frozen (0°F or below) |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Fish/ Seafood: Uncooked | | |
| Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, perch, bluefish) | 2 days | 3-6 months |
| Lean fish (cod, flounder, sole, haddock, pollock) | 2 days | 12 months |
| Shrimp, raw | 2 days | 9 months |
| Crab, canned | 6 months unopened; 5-7 days opened | Do not freeze |
| Crab, legs | 3-5 days | 9-12 months |
| Oysters, shucked | 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 | | |
| Fatty Fish (salmon, mackerel, perch, bluefish) | 5-7 days | 3-6 months |
| Lean Fish (cod, flounder, sole, haddock, pollock) | 5-7 days | 3-6 months |
| Shrimp and other Shellfish | 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 cuts | 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, opened | 1 week | 2 months |
| Chicken, Fried | 4 days | 4 months |
| Chicken, Nuggets/ Patties | 2 days | 3 months |
| Ham, unopened | 2 weeks | 1 year |
| Ham, opened | 1 week | 1-2 months |
| Hot Dogs, unopened | 2 weeks | 9 months |
| Luncheon Meats, deli sliced or opened | 3-5 days | Do not freeze |
| Luncheon Meats, unopened commercial package | 2 weeks | 1-2 months |
| Pepperoni, Salami | 1 month | 6 months |
| Sausage, raw | 2 days | 6 months |
| Sausage, smoked links or patties | 1 week | 9 months |



Prepared Foods:

Prepared foods should be kept refrigerated until distributed. These foods are perishable, and leaving them at room temperature will shorten their shelf life.

| Prepared Items/ Deli Foods | Refrigerated (41°F or below) | Frozen (0°F or below) |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Chicken, Roasted or Fried | 3-4 days | 4-6 months |
| Fruit, cut | Best By Date | Do Not Freeze |
| 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 |
| 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 |
| Spinach, salad greens (bagged) | Date on Bag | Do Not Freeze |

Tips on Storing Fresh Produce:

- ✓ Most fruits and vegetables have the best quality when kept refrigerated. There are, however some exceptions.
- ✓ Tomatoes taste best if *not* refrigerated. Cold storage can cause them to become mealy.
- ✓ Bananas should not be refrigerated unless fully ripe, and then they should be used within 1-2 days. Refrigeration will cause banana skin to blacken, but the fruit will not ripen while cold.
- ✓ If they are very fresh, apples, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) can be stored at room temperature, but these items should be refrigerated as they ripen.
- ✓ Hardy vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash can be stored in cool, dark places outside of the cooler.



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