

Quick Shelf Life Guide (taken from Ventura County's Food Bank)

DCCFP often receives donations of food items after the date on the package has expired. In most cases, this food is still safe to eat! Food manufacturers use different date codes to ensure that consumers receive their product at peak quality. Once a product is past code date, many manufacturers donate it to food banks. Some foods deteriorate quickly, while the quality of other items may last longer than expected.

PRODUCT DATING

Coded dates (packing numbers) may appear on shelf-stable products such as cans and boxes of food. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock, as well as locate their products in the event of a recall.

Calendar code dates help stores determine how long to display the product for sale and relate to the peak quality of food, not safety. Calendar code dates are found primarily on perishable foods, such as dairy, products, eggs, meat and poultry.

Four ways products are dated: It is important to understand the difference!

- “Sell-by” date – tells the store how long to display the product for sale.
- “Best if Used By (or Before)” – recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- “Use By” – the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality. The manufacturer of the product has determined the date.
- “Exp. (or Expires)” – this is a true expiration date. The food is not safe to eat and must be thrown away.

REFRIGERATED AND FROZEN FOODS

Most meats, dairy and deli items are only good for 1-2 days AFTER the coded date. FROZEN FOODS can be good for 2-6 months.

MILK: 1 week after coded date

CHEESE: 1-2 weeks after coded date

UNCOOKED MEATS: 1-2 days after coded date if refrigerated, 2-6 months if Frozen

Processed MEATS (ham, salami, turkey): 1-2 weeks after coded date

All thawed raw or cooked foods can be refrozen if they still contain ice crystals or are 40°F or below, but there may be some quality loss. • Foods thawed and held above 40°F for more than two hours should be discarded. Discard any perishable foods have been above 40°F for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch.

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FRESH PRODUCE

Raw fruit and vegetables can be held at room temperature, stored in the refrigerator or frozen. **For most produce, refrigeration is the best way to maintain quality and delay ripening.** There are, however, some exceptions: tomatoes and bananas. Very fresh fruits (apples, mangos, peaches) and garlic, onions, potatoes, squash, can be stored at room temperature in a cool location.

PANTRY STORAGE

(cans, jars, boxed foods)

Shelf-stable foods such as canned goods can be kept safely at room temperature. Avoid temperatures over 100 degrees or below 30 degrees. Most Shelf stable foods can be kept **ONE YEAR** after coded date. **EXCEPT FOR BABY FOOD.**

Do Not Consume Food from Cans or Jars If:

- 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 Hand Out Food from Boxes If:

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

Box without an inside bag:

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