

Decoding Expiration Dates



Unopened canned and boxed foods are often safe long after the stamped date. The shelf life of refrigerated and frozen foods can be extended with proper handling.

What Does It Mean?

BEST IF USED-BY" OR "BEST BEFORE"

- When a product's flavor and quality will be best.
- The product is still safe to eat even though nutrients and quality slowly decline.

"SELL-BY"

- On refrigerated foods such as milk, yogurt, cheese, eggs, lunch meat, and packaged salad.
- Stores must sell these foods by this date even though they are still safe to eat.

"EXPIRATION DATE"

- Only on baby formula, medicines, and vitamins which should not be used after this date.

Canned Foods Shelf Life	After Code Date
Beans	3 years
High acid foods (fruit, tomato-based)	1-2 years
Low acid foods (vegetables, most soups)	2-3 years
Meat and Fish	2-3 years
Condiments Shelf Life	After Code Date
Ketchup, chili sauce	18 months
Mayonnaise	3-6 months
Mustard	2 years
Olives, Pickles	2 years
Salad dressing	1 year
Salsa	12-18 months
Spaghetti sauce	18 months
Vinegar	2 years
Shelf-Stable Beverages Shelf Life	After Code Date
Soy or rice milk	6 months
Nutritional aids (Ensure)	1 year
Juice	9 months
Milk evaporated, dry	1 year
Dry Goods Shelf Life	After Code Date
Dried beans	1 year
Bread	3-5 days, 3 months if frozen
Cereal and Oatmeal	1 year
Crackers	8 months
White flour	1 year
Whole wheat flour	6 months
Dried fruit	6 months
Mac and Cheese	9-12 months
Pasta	2-3 years
Peanut butter	18 months
Popcorn	2 years
Brown rice	1 year
White rice	2 years
Dairy Shelf Life	After Code Date
Butter	3 months, 1 year if frozen
Hard cheese	6 months
Soft cheese	1-2 weeks
Yogurt	2 weeks
Milk	1 week