

Best By, use by, sell By, freeze by What food labels mean!

Properly stored food is almost always safe to eat past this date, provided it shows no signs of spoilage.

Food pantries are able to access quality food that stores can no longer sell.

There are strict guidelines to how they must be stored till used.

This guide provides information and links to more information.

If you would like an electronic copy of this information, please email bruincommunitypantry@georgefox.edu

[Food Safety & Inspection Service](#)

[College of Family & Consumer Sciences](#)

[Food Expiration Dates](#)

[Best of Used by Dates](#)



What the Labels Really Mean

- **Best By / Best Before:** The date recommended for the best flavor or quality. Safe to consume afterward, though texture or taste may decline.
- **Use By:** The last recommended date for peak quality. Still largely about quality rather than a strict safety deadline, except in rare cases.
- **Sell By:** A guide for the grocery store telling them how long to display the item. You can still purchase and consume this food, but it should be used quickly.
- **Freeze By:** Indicates when to freeze a product for optimal quality. Freezing effectively pauses spoilage.

How to Check for Spoilage

Rather than relying on the printed date, trust your senses before eating:

- **Look:** Inspect for mold, changes in color, or severely dented/rusted packaging.
- **Smell:** Sniff the food for any sour, rancid, or unusual odors.
- **Taste:** If in doubt, taste a tiny amount. If it tastes sour or off, discard it.

Storage and Shelf Life

The actual lifespan of your food heavily depends on storage conditions. A general breakdown by category includes:

- **Pantry Items (Unopened):** Canned goods (soups, vegetables) and dried staples (pasta, rice, beans) remain safe for years, though quality drops after 2 to 5 years.
- **Dairy:** Milk and yogurt often remain safe 1-2 weeks past the date if kept consistently below 40 degrees.
- **Meat & Poultry:** Generally safe for 1-2 days in the fridge (raw) before you need to cook or freeze them.

For highly specific storage times and guidelines on hundreds of different items, you can look up exact food categories using the USDA's [FoodKeeper App](#).

To break down whether to keep or toss perfectly good food, consult the [USDA Food Product Dating Guide](#).

slurp

12 FOODS THAT LAST LONGER THAN THE LABEL SAYS



MILK IN TETRAPACK
3–5 days after opening



PACKAGED YOGURT
Unopened, 1–2 weeks past date



EGGS
3–5 weeks in fridge



BREAD
5–7 days



WHITE RICE
Indefinite



DRY PASTA
1–2 years past date



BUTTER
1–3 months past date



HONEY
Indefinite



SALT
Indefinite



VINEGAR
Indefinite



OIL
6–12 months after opening



FLOUR
6–12 months

Food Expiration Date Chart

Eggs	Eat within 3 to 5 weeks when refrigerated
Yogurt	Eat within 2 weeks when refrigerated; within 2 months when frozen
Milk	Drink within 1 week (opened) when refrigerated; within 3 months when frozen
Butter	Eat within 3 months when refrigerated; within 6 months when frozen
Bacon	Eat within 2 weeks (unopened) or 1 week (opened) when refrigerated; within 1 month when frozen
Cold cuts, packaged	Eat within 2 weeks (unopened) or 5 days (opened) when refrigerated; within 2 months when frozen
Hot dogs	Eat within 2 weeks (unopened) or 1 week (opened) when refrigerated; within 1 to 2 months when frozen
Ketchup	Eat within 6 months (opened) when refrigerated; can store in pantry for 1 year (unopened)
Mayonnaise	Eat within 2 months (opened) when refrigerated; can store in pantry for 3 months (unopened)
Jams and jellies	Eat within 6 months (opened) when refrigerated; can store in pantry for 1 year (unopened)
Rice & dried pasta	Eat within 2 years
Soda, bottles & cans	Drink within 2 days (opened) when refrigerated; can store in pantry for 6 months (unopened)
Great chart to use!	https://www.realsimple.com/food-recipes/shopping-storing/food/food-expiration-dates-guidelines-chart
Bread	About a week, or longer if frozen.