

PACKAGE DATING OF GOODS



The dates on packages of foods are guidelines to help consumers use food at its peak quality and before spoilage occurs. This is important in making sure our food is wholesome and won't cause any ill health effects. The following list of terms found on food labels, can assist you and help ensure that your food will be safe to eat. They apply only to unopened packages of food. After opening, food should be refrigerated and used within a week.

A **"date of pack or manufacture"**, often used on fresh meat and fish, refers to when the food was packed or processed for sale. Most meats also include a "use by" date. These foods are highly perishable and should be refrigerated and used within 5 to 7 days after opening. Ground beef and poultry should be consumed 1-2 days after purchase. If you are unable to use them within this time, it is best to freeze them. For a complete Food Storage Chart, call your local Cooperative Extension Office.

A **"freshness, pull-or sell-by date"**, found on dairy and fresh bakery products, refers to the last day the product should be sold. The date allows you a reasonable length of time to use the food. Milk is usually good at least 1 week after the "sell by" date if kept under 40° F.

"Use before" or "best if used by" dates are found on foods including frozen foods, fried snack foods, cereals, canned foods, macaroni and rice. This indicates the date after which the food is no longer at its best, but can be used safely.

An **"expiration" or "use by"** date is often found on yeast and unbaked breads and indicates when the food is no longer acceptable for consumption. It should not be bought or used after this date. The "use by" date on baby food and baby formulas should be strictly observed, to guarantee safety for your child. Eggs also include expiration dates. Make sure any egg products are not purchased beyond that date.

Be sure to read food labels for food storage instructions such as **"refrigerate after opening"** or **"keep frozen"**. Many labels now also include safe food handling instructions. For example, cook meats thoroughly, use a meat thermometer, wash hands and utensils after touching raw meats, and refrigerate.

References

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