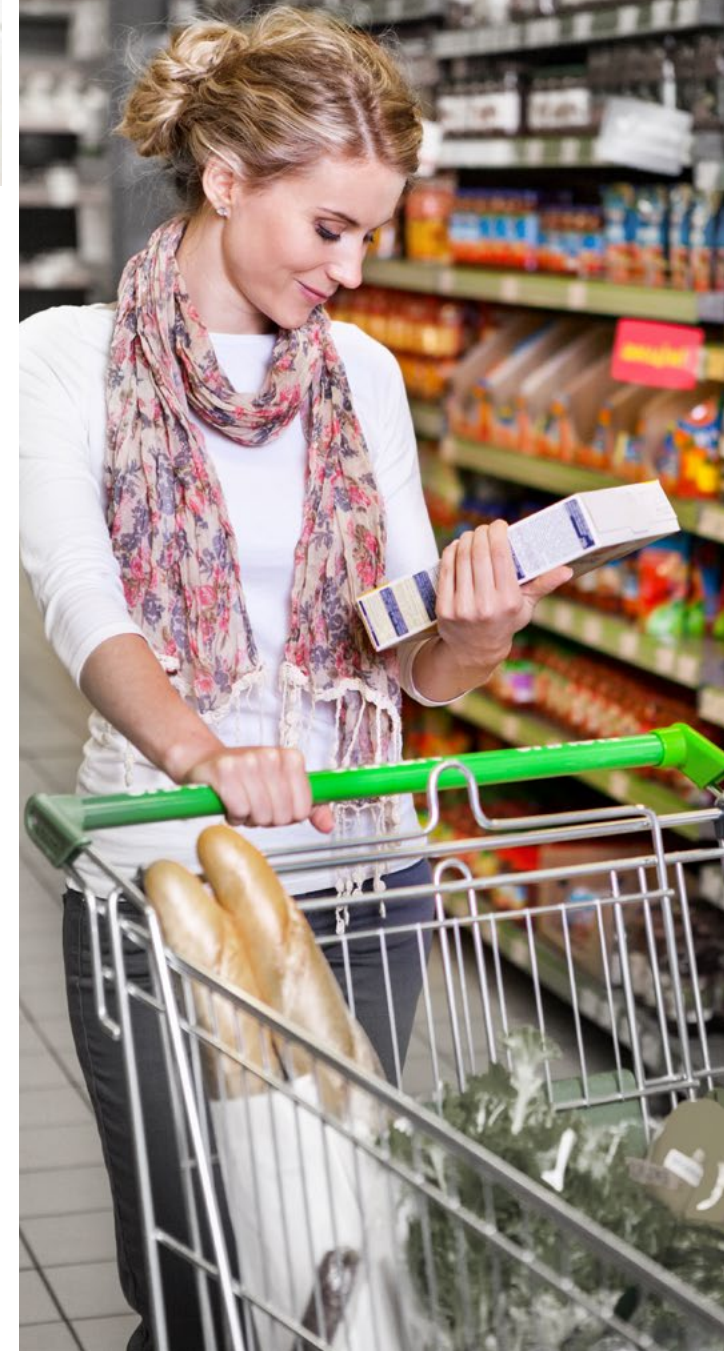




Food Product Dating



Dates on Egg Cartons

The “Sell-By” or “Expiration” (EXP) date on egg cartons is not Federally required but may be regulated by the state where the eggs are marketed. Egg cartons with the U.S. Department of Agriculture grade shield on them must display the “Pack Date.” This is the day the eggs were washed, graded, and placed in the carton. The number is a three-digit code, a “Julian Date,” which begins with January 1 as 001 and ending with December 31 as 365. On egg cartons bearing the USDA grade shield, the “Sell-By” code date may not exceed 45 days from the date of pack. Always purchase eggs before the “Sell-By” or “EXP” date on the carton.

UPC or Bar Codes

Universal Product Codes (UPC) are not required by Federal regulation and are used by stores and manufacturers for production, shipping, inventory, and marketing purposes.

Storage Times

Product dates are not a guide for safe use of a product. In general, you should use, refrigerate, or freeze your perishable items when you get home from the grocer. Once a perishable product is frozen continuously and not mishandled, it is considered safe indefinitely even if it is beyond any “Use-By” date.

Always follow the product’s storage and handling recommendations.



<http://phc.amedd.army.mil>
1-800-222-9698
APHC Food Protection

More information is available at the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Food Safety and Inspection Service website: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/> This information brochure was written by Army Veterinary Services personnel and published by the Army Public Health Center to inform and educate Service members, beneficiaries, and retirees about Food Safety. Comments or questions regarding content can be directed to ARMY-VSPublications@mail.mil. Locate your local Veterinary Treatment Facility at <https://tiny.army.mil/r/JG66r/VTFs>



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“Don’t eat that! It is expired! Just look at the date on the package.”

We have all heard this, and maybe we, too, have questioned what the date on a package of hot dogs means. Is the food expired, safe, dangerous, or is the date on the package just something grocers use to rotate their products? So, what does the “Date” stamped on food products really mean, and should you pay any attention to it?

Food Product Dating, which is found on almost all of the food we purchase and eat, is not required by Federal regulations except for on two very important food items: Infant formula and select baby food products. Food Product Dating is required by more than 20 states on some, or all, of the foods sold and consumed in that state.

There is NO uniform or universally accepted system for food dating in the United States. However, if a calendar date is used, then it must display both the month and day of the month. In the case of dry goods and frozen products, it will also display the year. It also must show what the date means, for example, “Sell-By” or “Use-By.”

What is Food Dating?

Open Dating is a calendar date stamped on a product’s package and is found primarily on perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products. Common Open Dating types are “Use-By” or “Sell-By” dates. These dates are a manufacturer’s suggestion for peak freshness, quality, taste, and nutrient value but are not indicators of food safety. There are no Federal guidelines regarding “Sell-By” dates. Feeding America issues standard guidelines which indicate most dairy products are good for 7-10 days after their “Sell-By” date and meats should be frozen by the “Sell-By” date. While foods may not be at peak quality past this date, proper handling and cooking will make them safe to use.

Closed or Coded Dating are manufacturer’s codes, usually found on canned or boxed food. This allows producers to track, rotate, and recall a product if required. These codes, which appear as a series of letters and/or numbers, might refer to the date or time of manufacture. They are not meant to be interpreted as “Use-By” dates. Cans may also display “Open” or calendar dates, which usually are “Best if Used By” dates for peak quality.

Types of Dates Seen on Food Packaging

- ❖ A “Sell-By” date helps the store manage product storage and display for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- ❖ A “Best if Used By (or Before)” date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a safety date and has been determined by the manufacturer to be the last date for peak quality of the product.
- ❖ A “Use-By” date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a safety date and has been determined by the manufacturer to be the last date for peak quality of the product.
- ❖ “Closed or Coded Dates” are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

Food Safety after Date Expires

If a product has a “Use-By” date, then follow that date and use the product before it expires to ensure you are getting the best quality and nutrient value. If the date expires during home storage, the product should still be safe and wholesome if it has not developed any off odors, colors, or flavors.

If a product has a “Sell-By” date or no date, then cook or freeze the product as recommended by the manufacturer or grocer.

If foods are improperly stored, refrigerated, or not otherwise protected from the environment and possible contaminants, food-borne bacteria can grow and cause spoilage before or after the date on the package.

Common mishandling mistakes include:

- Defrosting frozen foods at room temperature for longer than 2 hours
- Leaving foods out in the sun or weather (for example, at a picnic)
- Allowing raw foods and juices to come into contact with already cooked or prepared foods
- Handling foods without using proper sanitary practices

Always follow the preparation and cooking instructions on the label to ensure top quality and safety.

Special Food Dating

Dates on Infant Formula & Baby Food — Federal regulations require a “Use-By” date on the product label of infant formula and certain types of baby food. Baby food dating is for quality as well as nutrient retention. Do not buy or use baby formula or baby food after its “Use-By” date.

