

# Expiration Dates

## Your health is IMPORTANT to us

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. Food Bank staff monitors this food to ensure that the quality remains good.

Many canned and boxed products are safe to eat long after the date on the container, and the shelf life of refrigerated and frozen foods can be extended if they are handled properly. Once a per-ishable item is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires—foods kept frozen continuously are safe indefinitely, though the quality slowly deteriorates over time.

Most dates applied to food are for quality and not for safety. Food products are safe to consume past the date on the label, and regardless of the date, consumers should evaluate the quality of the food product prior to its consumption.

### "USE BY"

The last date recommended for the use of a product while at peak quality. **It is not a safety date.**

### "SELL BY"

Tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. **It is not a safety date.**

### "BEST IF USED BY"

Indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. **It is not a purchase or safety date.**

### "EXPIRES"

Indicates that it is **NOT** safe for distribution or consumption.

The only foods that are required by federal law to have expiration dates are baby food, infant formula, and over-the-counter medications. No medicines should be distributed after the expiration date. The Food Bank does not distribute most baby food past its expiration date. However, some products designed for babies such as juice and cookies or biscuits can be distributed past their date and are safe to eat.

# When in doubt, throw it out!