

The following table provides guidance on how to use the dates on packaging. Remember, this is just a guide – it's up to you, the consumer, to use your best judgement. Many foodborne pathogens cannot be seen, tasted or smelled, so when in doubt, throw it out. **By being informed, we can waste less food and feed more of our neighbors.**

Food Coding Guidance

Food Type

**Canned Goods
- High Acid**

**Canned Goods
- Low Acid**

Dry Goods

**Frozen Meats
and Sides**

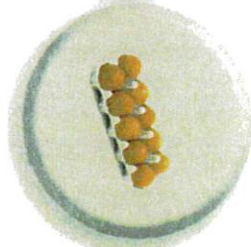
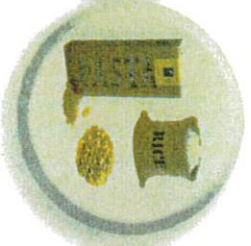
Dairy

Produce

Eggs

**Bread and
Bakery**

Examples



Guideline - Quality

Can be consumed
12-18 months
after date

Can be consumed
2-5 years
after date

Can be consumed
1-2 years
after date

If frozen before or
on best-by date, safe
for consumption
indefinitely. Once
thawed, consume
within the week

Can be consumed
1-3 weeks
after date

3 days for high
perishable (berries/
mushrooms) an up to
3 months for harder
items (potatoes
winter squash)

Can be consumed
3-5 weeks
after date

Can be consumed
1-3 weeks
after date

Guideline - Physical Condition

Discard if heavily
dented, rusting,
punctured or
missing label

Discard if heavily
dented, rusting,
punctured or
missing label

Discard if
packaging
is ripped

Discard if
package is ripped
or emitting a
rancid or
foul odor

Discard if product
emits sour/foul odor,
appears chunky
or off-color

Discard if
signs of
mold/foul odor

Discard if
shells are cracked
or broken

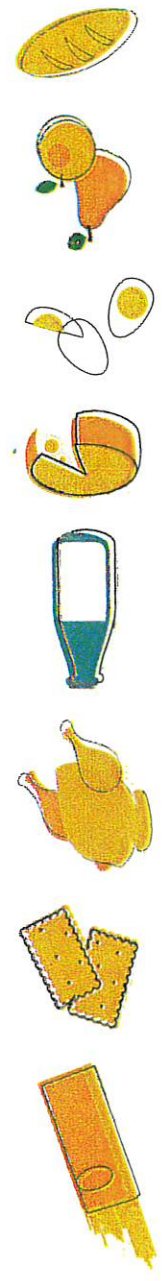
Discard if signs
of mold growth

* The only food item regulated by the Federal Government for safety and quality is infant formula.

SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

The suggested shelf life (how long an item is considered "good" past the code date) varies drastically from product to product, even between similar types of items. For example, some shelf-stable items can be kept for 3-5 years past the date, while others might only be good for 1 month after the date. Because it is impractical to memorize hundreds of different items' shelf lives, we have created a more user-friendly list of broad category shelf life guidelines. It is important to remember that these guidelines are in fact just that – guidelines! They are primarily intended to ensure quality, not safety. The product should be safe as long as the product has been properly handled and stored, and does not have significant damage. The following should be used for training staff and volunteers who will be inspecting donations. Please refer to The Food Keeper brochure, website, or app available for more specific items' recommended shelf lives.

Food Item	Shelf Life After Code Date
SHELF STABLE	
canned goods (low acidity)*	3 years
canned goods (high acidity)**	18 months
dry beans, rice, pasta, ramen	2 years
boxed/bagged goods - cereal, crackers, mixes, etc.	1 year
saucers, condiments, dressings	1 year
beverages	1 year
chips	2 months
mayonaisse/cream based items	3 months
baby food/adult formula	discard after date
FROZEN	
all assorted meats/poultry	2 months
fruit, vegetables	6 months
ice cream	2 months
DAIRY/COOLER	
juice	3 weeks
milk (except Borden)	1 week (discard all Borden products after date)
cheese	1 week (soft) 1 month (hard)
eggs	3 weeks
yogurt, sour cream, dips	2 weeks
salsa, pesto	discard after date
hummus	1 week
prepared dishes or meals	3 days
salads	3 days
PRODUCE	
packaged produce (bagged lettuce, etc.)	discard after date
cut produce	discard after date
BREAD/PASTRY	
fresh	4 days
frozen	1 month
containing cream	throw away if not kept refrigerated/frozen



*Examples of low acidity canned goods: meat/poultry, soups/stews, pasta, potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, peas, beets, beans, pumpkin
 **Examples of high acidity canned goods: tomato products, fruits, sauerkraut, foods in vinegar-based sauces/dressings