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 perishable 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.

**Food Safety Tips**

*Your health is important to us!*

- **"use by"**
  The last date recommended for the use of the 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 (such as medicines, baby food, and baby formula)
Expiration Date Grace Periods

USDA suggests these grace periods following a product’s "use by" or "best by" dates.

- **Baked Goods**: 3 Months if frozen includes bread
- **Baking**: 1 Year
- **Canned Items**: 5 Years non-perishable foods
- **Cereals & Breakfast Items**: 1 Year
- **Healthy Snacks**: 1 Year crackers, nuts, granola bars, etc.
- **Condiments**: 1 Year
- **Dried Beans, Rice, & Pasta**: 3 Years
- **Drinks (not water)**: 6 Months includes powdered drinks
- **Frozen Products**: 1 Year includes meat
- **Processed Refrigerated Food**: 1 Month
- **Milk**: 3 Months if frozen
- **Snacks**: 6 Months potato chips, popcorn, etc.
- **Peanut Butters**: 2 Years
- **Soup**: 2 Years broths, bullion cubes, ramen
- **Refrigerated Dairy**: 2 wks - 3mo if frozen yogurt, sour cream, cheese
- **Water**: 2 Years
- **Medical Products**: No Grace Period
- **Baby Products**: No Grace Period