

Understanding Date Labels on Packaged Foods

Preventing waste by understanding what date labels really mean

Date labels, also called “open dating” labels, are based on quality, not safety (except for infant formula products).

BEST IF USED BY/BEFORE:

When a product will have its best quality and flavor.

USE BY:

The last date recommended safe to consume the product while it has its best quality.

SELL BY:

The last day that the product must be for sale in the store.



ARE FOODS SAFE TO EAT AFTER THE DATE PASSES?

Be cautious when deciding whether or not to consume food after the date has passed on the label. It should be safe to consume if it has been stored properly. However, you should regularly check your pantry and refrigerator to see if there are any changes in texture and smell.

Tips for common foods

CANNED FOOD

Can last as long as two to five years, avoid cans with bulging or popped seals.

DAIRY

Good for about a week after its sell-by-date. Do not consume if it has a vinegar smell or has separated into clumps.

OILS

Usually lasts for years if unopened. Keep oils in a cool, dry place and keep flavorful nut oils and rendered animal fats refrigerated to help preserve.

EGGS

Keep them in their carton and roughly follow the dates instead of using the refrigerator holder.

FLOURS

White flour will last for years, but whole wheat flour will only last a few months. Store it in the freezer to save it longer than a few months.

RICE

Brown rice only lasts a few months, compared to white rice. Store them in the freezer if you plan to keep them longer than a few months.

SPICES

Whole spices last about 1-3 years, ground spices are shorter. Store them away from moisture or strong heat and direct sunlight. Organize the spice cabinet more often. If spices lose their aroma or flavor, they are not necessarily bad. To reactivate their essential oils, heat for a few seconds on a hot pan stirring constantly until fragrant.