

Date Labeling Overview



“Expiration,” “use by,” and “sell by” dates on your food packaging can be very confusing. The most important thing to remember is that any date label is an indicator of food quality (flavor, texture, etc.) and not food safety. Food safety depends on proper handling, storing, and cooking, so cannot be determined by a date stamp.

What do these dates mean?

According to the USDA:

“Best if Used By/Before” indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

“Sell-By” dates tell the store how long to display the product for sale. It is not a safety date.

“Use-By” dates are the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula.



EXP = Expiration Date
(same as “use by”)

BBF = Best Before (same as
“best if used by”)

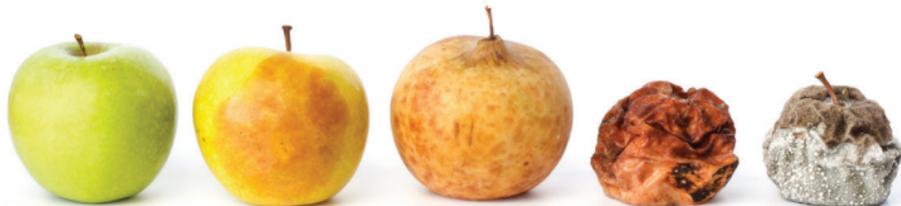
MFG = Manufactured Date
(date produced. Not an
indicator of expiration)

PROD = Produced on (Not
an indicator of expiration)



How can I tell if food is bad?

Trust your senses! Carefully inspect any food product you think may be spoiled. If you detect any bad or “off” smells, visible mold, or if the food is sticky or slimy, then it is spoiled and should not be eaten. Spoiled food won’t usually make you sick, but it will not taste good! When in doubt, it’s safest to throw it out.



Many food products are safe and wholesome past “expiration.”

- Shelf stable items like canned goods, dried beans, grains, pasta, spices, and baking products can be used for weeks or months past the dates.
- Milk will usually stay fresh for 7 to 10 days past the date- and you can safely use soured milk in place of buttermilk for cooking!
- Eggs can be good for 3 to 5 weeks after the date: to check, place eggs in a bowl of water. If they sink, they’re still fresh! If they float, it’s time to throw them out.

