

MAKING SENSE OF FOOD PRODUCT DATING

It's important to start by remembering that product dating on most products is **optional**. Except for infant formula, where product dating is required and sale is restricted after the date marked, food product dates are almost always **quality dates**. Manufacturers use these quality dates to indicate to consumers when products are at their optimum quality for consumption. Many products can safely be used **after** the date marked on the package.



Source: theintentionallife.com

Pull Date

Example: "Sell By"

Foods that use this date: milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, cream, eggs, lunch meats, packaged salad mixes.



What does the date mean? These dates tell the retail store how long to display the products for sale. Although the store should pull a product after the "sell by" date has passed, in some states it remains legal to sell the food after this date. The food will be safe to eat after this date if it has been kept refrigerated. Milk will usually be edible at least one week longer. Other foods like yogurt or eggs will keep for several weeks beyond the date listed. Fresh meat, fish and poultry should be cooked within a day or 2 of home refrigeration, or placed in the freezer for longer storage. Once frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires because foods kept frozen are safe almost indefinitely.

Quality Assurance Dates

Example: "Better if used by", "Best by"

Foods that use this date: packaged mixes like macaroni and cheese, boxed soups, bakery products, cheese, some canned foods, cold cereals, peanut butter, mayonnaise.



What does the date mean? These foods have a long shelf life, but eventually they will begin to lose their flavor or develop off-flavors. The date listed is an estimate of how long the food will be of **optimal quality**. Quality is defined as smell, taste and texture—not as safety. Therefore, after the date listed, the food may not taste as good, but it will still be safe.

If the product smells or tastes bad, or if the seal on the package has been broken, don't use it.

Expiration Date

Examples: "Expires", "Do not use after"

Products that use this date: infant formula, baby food, vitamins, over-the-counter drugs, yeast, baking powder, cake mixes, pectin.

What does this date mean? Although these products may be safe if consumed after this date, their usefulness and quality may be reduced. Infant formula, baby food, and over-the-counter drugs should **never** be consumed after the expiration date because they may not function in the body as they are supposed to. Rising agents like yeast will be safe after this date, but may not be as effective.

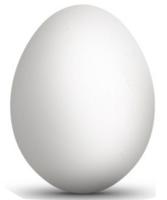
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- ◆ "SELL BY": HOW LONG THE STORE SHOULD DISPLAY FOR SALE
- ◆ "BEST IF USED BY": FOR FLAVOR, NOT SAFETY
- ◆ "USE BY": LAST DATE TO USE FOR BEST QUALITY

Eggs

What about the shelf life of eggs?

The "sell by" or "expiration date" on a carton of eggs is the last day the store may sell the eggs as fresh. On grade AA eggs, this date can't be more than 30 days from the date the eggs were packed in the carton. They are still **safe** in your refrigerator for 3-5 weeks **after** the date marked as long as they have been kept refrigerated (40°F or colder).



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