



"BEST BEFORE" DATES & CODES



There is a great deal of confusion around food manufacturers' labels with a "Best Before" date.

What does "Best Before" mean?

It means that the food producer is recommending that the product will be in peak condition until that date. It does NOT mean that the food is no good after that date. For example, a can of cream soup could start to separate and needs to be stirred until smooth again but there is nothing the least bit harmful or unsafe about it.

What looks like a "best before" date may, in fact, be a production code put on at the factory to identify when the food was packed. This is a safety and quality control measure for use by the manufacturer. Each company has its own code that tells them the year, month, day and shift when it was packed. If this is seen as an "expiry" date, it's a big mistake. Some labels which state "Display until....." or "Sell Before....." may be related to an in-store sales promotion and have nothing to do with food quality or safety.

PERISHABLES

Obviously some foods like dairy products, bread, fruit and vegetables, do have a short shelf life. Packaged goods will usually have a "best before" date.



Milk and Dairy Products

Respect the "Best Before" dates for milk and dairy products—the dairies have asked us to do so. Try to give it away before the date but throw away afterwards, unless you're using it in cooking or baking for a meal program.



Baby Foods and Formula

Baby foods and formula have a "Best Before" date which must be followed; nutritional quality may deteriorate after the date but it is also an issue of public relations—no one wishes to give their child less-than-perfect food.

Frozen and Refrigerated Foods

Frozen food needs to be kept solidly frozen until ready to use and once thawed, never re-frozen. Recommended temperatures: Frozen: -18 degrees. Refrigerated: +4 degrees.

Fresh Produce



Fresh fruits and vegetables will not tolerate temperatures that are too high or too low and it's obvious when they are past their "best before". However, many fresh fruits and vegetables can be salvaged by removing the outer leaves of lettuce, cutting out bad spots, etc.





Storage

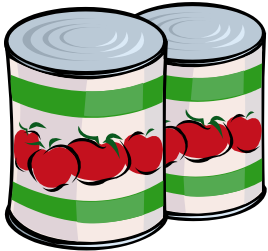
A carton of milk usually will last with proper storage for almost 4 weeks. However, proper storage is extremely important. If left unrefrigerated in 90 degree weather, a carton of milk could go sour in a few hours despite the fact its “Best Before” date is three weeks away

NON-PERISHABLES

Dry Foods: These include beans, rice, pasta. cereals. Etc

Storage: clean, cool, dry and protected from rodent and insect infestation. There is no “best before” if kept in proper conditions.

Canned Goods



If kept intact with no dents or creases, a can of food will remain perfectly wholesome for years. However, if it is badly dented or rusted it is unsafe. The “best before” date is often misinterpreted. Recently a food bank threw out cans of corned beef with a date of: 02 02 07. The cans were shiny and the paper labels were fresh, not ripped or faded. The food bank was reading the date backwards. The meat was good until 2007!

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has assured us that canned foods, if the can is in good condition, can last well past their coded dates. The food may lose some of its nutritional value and the flavour and texture may change but all and all, the food is **safe** to eat. If the food smells odd, looks or tastes bad, don't take any chances – remember: When in doubt, throw it out!

Dry Goods

Sometimes dry goods may come in boxes with an inner package (cereal, crackers etc.). If these boxes become damaged, check the inner packaging to ensure that there are no rips or tears. The product is still good and can be labeled (i.e. Cherrios or saltines) and given out to clients. If the product is exposed (ripped, torn, spilling out), throw it out – it could be contaminated!

If you happen to get a package that you are concerned about, do NOT call the food company. Please contact Daily Bread for information. Large industry donations always arrive with a guarantee from the company that the food is safe which we pass along to our agencies. If it is a single item, our staff can locate information about the product and supply it to you.