

Food Safety Resources



Proper food storage starts as soon as you select it at the store. Then the food must be handled carefully and safely at home. Check the product dating on the foods you purchase and use.

Filling Your Cart

- Shop for shelf-stable items such as canned and dry goods first.
- Buy refrigerated and frozen foods and hot deli items last -- right before checkout.
- Don't choose meat, fish, poultry or dairy products that feel warm to the touch or have a damaged or torn package.
- Place leaking packages in plastic bags.
- Choose only pasteurized dairy products.
- Choose only refrigerated eggs and make sure that they are not cracked or dirty.
- Check "sell-by" and use by dates on packages.
- Buy intact cans that are not bulging, leaking or dented on the seam or rim.

Handling Food Safely at Home

Many cases of food poisoning occur each year due to improper handling of foods in the home. Once you purchase food, go directly home. If this is not possible, keep a cooler in the car to transport perishable items. Immediately put cold perishables into the refrigerator or freezer.

Hot perishable foods picked up from the deli department need to be kept warm and consumed within two hours. If you purchase hot deli foods to eat at a later time, place the food in small portions in shallow containers in small portions and refrigerate or freeze as soon as possible. Perishable foods should be kept at room temperature no longer than two hours.

Bacteria multiply rapidly at temperatures between 40 degrees fahrenheit and 140 degrees fahrenheit. Unfortunately, the harmful bacteria that cause most cases of food poisoning cannot be seen, smelled or tasted. Therefore, it's important to:

Keep cold foods cold (40 degrees fahrenheit or below) and Hot foods hot (above 140 degrees fahrenheit) and follow these other rules for handling food safely:

- Keep everything clean -- hands, utensils, counters, cutting boards and sinks.
- Always wash hands thoroughly in hot soapy water before preparing foods and after handling raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- Don't let raw juices from meat, poultry or seafood touch ready-to-eat foods either in the refrigerator or during preparation.

Food Product Dating

Dates are printed on many food products. After the date expires, must you discard that food? In most cases, no. A calendar date may be stamped on a product's package to help the store determine how long to display the product for sale. It is not a safety date.

Product dating is not required by Federal regulations although dating of some foods is required by 15 states. Calendar dates are found primarily on perishable foods such as dairy products, eggs, meat and poultry. Coded dates might appear on shelf-stable products such as cans and boxes of food.

There are several types of dates:

- **"Sell-by" date** - tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- **"Best if Used By (or Before)"** - recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **"Use-By"** - the last date recommended for the use of product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- **"Closed or Coded Dates"** - packing numbers for use by the manufacturer in tracking their products. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as locate their products in the event of a recall.

Baby Food

Do not buy or use infant formula and baby food past its "use-by" date. Federal regulations require a date on those products.

Expired Dates

As long as a product is wholesome, a retailer may legally sell fresh or processed meat and poultry products beyond the expiration date on the package.

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