

FOOD DATING GUIDE

Food Dating Guide

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Feeding Westchester often receives food items that are close to or past the indicated date on their package. The majority of the time the food is still safe to eat! Food manufacturers use different date codes and terms to ensure that consumers receive their product at peak quality. Once a product is past code date, it can still be of good quality and safe to eat, thus many manufacturers donate it to food banks around that time. Feeding Westchester staff monitors this food to ensure that the quality remains good.

This guide explains the different code dates and terms you will find on food packages. Also included are suggestions for how long it's safe to consume food items after the printed dates on the package, and some information about Feeding Westchester and the services we provide.

Should any questions arise about items not included in this guide, call our nutritionist at (914) 923-1100, or email Danice Tatosian at danice.tatosian@FeedingWestchester.org with your question. We will determine a safe extension for the product in question as quickly as possible and add it to future revisions of the Food Dating Guide.

The following guide contains our best suggestions for how long food is safe to eat after the printed date. These dates are based off optimal storage conditions and no damage. If you are ever in doubt, throw it out!

Understanding Dates on Food Packages and Medicines

Many food products can be kept past their dates if they are handled properly. Understanding the different terms on food packages can help you decide if a food is still safe to eat. Here are some common date terms explained:

Expiration date

The only items required by federal law to have expiration dates are baby formula and medications; do not distribute or consume these items past the expiration date. Some states require eggs to have expiration dates, but they can still be safe to eat 3-5 weeks after their expiration dates.

Sell-by date

This is the date the stores must sell the food by. The manufacturer takes into account that the item will be stored at home after the Sell-by date. Since stores cannot sell products after the Sell-by date they usually donate the foods when they are close to this date. If the foods have been handled properly, they are still safe to eat and the quality is good.

Use-by date

This date is the manufacturer's recommendation for how long the food will be at peak quality. After the use-by date, the food is still safe to eat but it will slowly begin to lose nutrients.

Pack date

This is the date on which the product was packaged. This date is used by manufacturers for tracking purposes. These products have a long shelf life, have good quality and can be safe to eat past the date. (Refer to the individual product chart for more detailed references)

Shelf-Stable Products

Even though shelf-stable products and dry goods can be safe to eat past their dates, always examine the packaging according to the following guidelines.

Tips on Storing Canned and Boxed Food:

- Store cans and boxes 6 inches off the floor, either on a pallet or shelf, and 18 inches away from the wall so air can circulate.
- Store canned and boxed goods in a clean, dry, and cool area.
- Extremely hot (over 100° F) and cold (below 30° F) temperatures can damage canned goods and shorten shelf life.
- Always rotate your stock—First in-First out! Distribute or use older products before newer ones.

Do Not Consume Food from Cans, Jars or bags if:

- Leaking or stained
- Swollen
- Rusty
- Badly dented, crimped or pinched
- Container is cracked or torn
- Foul odor
- Safety seals are broken or missing
- Lids are loose or missing
- Foods exhibit changed color or odor—**never taste suspicious foods!**



Do Not Consume Food from Boxes If:

Inside bag:

- Is torn or leaking
- Has moldy or foreign objects inside
- Seals are ripped

Box without an inside bag:

- Is open or torn
- Has live or dead insects, webs, or droppings
- Is stained or wet



Shelf Stable Items	Shelf-Life After Code Date
Baby Food/Formula	
Cereal, food and formula	Do not consume after expiration date on package
Beverages/ Mixes	
Carbonated drinks	1 year
Coffee, hot chocolate	2 years
Coffee creamer	18 months
Juice	1 year
Milk	1 year
Nutrition aid supplements	Do not consume after expiration date on package
Rice milk, soy milk	6 months
Tea	3 years
Canned Foods	
High-acid foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fruit (including applesauce, juices) • pickles, sauerkraut • baked beans w/ mustard and vinegar • tomatoes, tomato based sauces & soups 	18 months
Low-acid foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gravy, soups/ broths (non-tomato based) • pasta, stews, cream sauces • vegetables (not tomatoes) • fish and meat 	4 years
Pie filling	3 years
Condiments, Sauces, Syrups	
Barbeque sauce	1 year
Frosting, tubs	1 year
Honey, molasses, syrups (chocolate, corn, pancake)	2 years
Jams, jellies, preserves	18 months
Ketchup, cocktail sauce, chili sauce, salsa	1 year
Mayonnaise	6 months
Mustard, olives, pickles	2 years
Salad dressings	1 year
Vinegar	2 years
Worcestershire sauce	2 years
Dry Goods	
Baking mixes (cake mix, pancake mix)	1 year
Baking powder/soda	3 years for consumption
Bars (i.e. granola, protein, cereal)	18 months

Dry Goods (continued)	Shelf-Life After Code Date
Beans and lentils, dried	3 years
Bouillon cubes	2 years
Bread, cakes (commercially prepared) **Frozen breads and cakes can be kept indefinitely as long as the food remains frozen. Once thawed, can be kept in the refrigerator for 5 days).	5 days
Candy	3 years
Cereal (hot and cold)	1 year
Cookies, crackers, pretzels	1 year
Cornmeal	1 year
Flour	1 year
Fruit, dried	1 year
Macaroni and cheese mix	3 years
Nuts (jar or can)	1 year
Nut oils	6 months
Oils (olive, vegetable, canola)	2 years
Pasta, dry	3 years
Peanut butter	2 years
Popcorn, kernels	2 years
Popcorn, commercially popped and bagged	1 year
Popcorn, microwave packets	2 years
Potato chips	1 year
Potatoes (mashed, instant flakes)	2 years
Rice (white or brown)	3 years
Spices	3 years
Sugar	3 years
Toaster pastries	1 year
Tortillas/wraps	3 months

Refrigerated Products

Tips on Storing Refrigerated Food:

- Keep all chilled food refrigerated at or below 41° F until consuming or distributing.
- Leave space for air to circulate between items in the refrigerator.
- Keep raw meats, poultry or fish on the bottom shelf and ready-to-eat food on top to avoid dangerous cross contamination from drips.
- Rotate stock so older foods can be distributed first.
- You can safely consume most homemade left overs for up to seven days as long as it's kept at or below 41° F.
- When purchasing or receiving prepared foods not listed in this table ensure that product has been properly refrigerated and follow package use by date.

Refrigerated Items	Safe refrigeration time after code date
Butter	3 months
Buttermilk	2 weeks
Cheese (cottage, ricotta, soft, cream cheese)	2 weeks
Cheese, hard; shredded parmesan	6 months
Cheese, processed slices, shredded	1 month
Coffee creamer (liquid, refrigerated)	3 weeks
Cream	1 week
Dough, pie crust	Sell-by date on package
Eggs in shell	1 month
Eggs, pasteurized; substitute or real	10 days
Fruit, cut	4 days
Guacamole, hummus	1 week
Juice, purchased refrigerated	3 weeks
Margarine	6 months
Meat- poultry, ground beef, pork, fish, seafood, venison	Follow "use-by date"; or cook/freeze within 1-3 days of "sell-by date"
Milk (not shelf stable)	1 week
Pasta, fresh	2 days
Pudding, purchased refrigerated	2 days
Salads, prepared (macaroni, egg, tuna etc.)	2 days
Sour cream	3 weeks
Whipped cream, aerosol	2 months
Yogurt	4-6 weeks

Frozen Products

Most food can be kept indefinitely if it remains continuously frozen at or below 0°F, although the quality can slowly deteriorate over time.

Tips on Storing Frozen Food:

- Keep all frozen food at or below 0° F until distribution.
- Leave meat, poultry, and seafood in the original packaging when distributing. It is unsafe to open and repack these foods.
- Do not accept frozen foods that have ice crystals or frozen liquids- this is evidence of the food being previously thawed and then refrozen. Freezer burn does not make food unsafe- it appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and just means air came in contact with the food.
- All meat from Feeding Westchester is distributed frozen. Meat should not be thawed and refrozen. Once meat is thawed, use it according to the information in following table.
- Most foods can be frozen indefinitely, but some foods do not freeze well. These foods include mayonnaise, cream sauce, yogurt, cheese, sour cream, milk and lettuce. Raw meat and poultry will maintain their quality longer when frozen than cooked meat and poultry because moisture is lost during cooking.
- Items that should not be frozen are canned foods, eggs and aerosol cans.
- **Safe thawing:** Never thaw foods at room temperature! Bacteria grows rapidly at room temperature and can make your food dangerous to eat. You can thaw food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water and in the microwave.

Frozen Items	Recommended Time to Store Frozen Items in the Refrigerator
Bacon, ham, lunch meats, hot dogs, pepperoni (unopened)	2 weeks
Desserts	1 week
Dinners, prepared	1 week
Dough, bread, bagels	1 week
Fruit and juice concentrate	1 week
Meat and fish, cooked	4 days
Meat and fish, raw	2 days
Soy meat substitutes	4 days
Vegetables	1 week
Waffles, pancakes	1 week











Fresh Produce

Tips on Storing Fresh Produce:

- Most fruits and vegetables have the best quality when kept refrigerated. There are, however, some exceptions
- Tomatoes taste best if *not* refrigerated. Cold storage can cause them to become mealy.
- Bananas should not be refrigerated unless fully ripe, and then they should be used within 1-2 days. Refrigeration will cause banana skin to blacken, but the fruit will not ripen while cold.
- Unripe apples, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) can be stored at room temperature, but these items should be refrigerated as they ripen.
- Hardy vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash should be stored in cool, dark places outside of the refrigerator.
- Never store produce below meat or fish in the refrigerator.
- If you have produce that is about to spoil, be creative! Brown bananas are perfect for banana bread, apples can be made into applesauce and tomatoes can be made into tomato sauce!



Storing Produce for Best Taste

		Fruits and Melons	Vegetables
STORAGE LOCATION	Store In Refrigerator	Apples <i>(more than 7 days)</i> apricots blackberries blueberries cherries cut fruits figs grapes nashi (Asian pears) raspberries strawberries  	artichokes asparagus green beans lima beans beets broccoli Brussels sprouts cabbage carrots cauliflower celery collard greens cut vegetables escarole greens green onions leafy vegetables leeks lettuce mushrooms peas radishes spinach summer squashes sweet corn   
	Ripen on the counter first, then store in the refrigerator	avocados kiwifruit nectarines peaches pears plums plumcots 	None
	Store only at room temperature	apples <i>(fewer than 7 days)</i> bananas grapefruit lemons limes mangoes melons oranges papayas pineapple plantain pomegranates tangerines watermelons  	cucumbers dry onions* eggplant garlic* ginger jicama peppers potatoes* pumpkins winter squashes sweet potatoes* tomatoes   <p>*Store garlic, onions, potatoes, and sweet potatoes in a well-ventilated area in the pantry. Protect potatoes from light to avoid greening.</p> <p>Cucumbers, eggplant, and peppers can be kept in the refrigerator for 1 to 3 days if they are used soon after removal from the refrigerator.</p>

Programs at Feeding Westchester

Back-Pack Program

This program distributes back-packs to children in the high-need areas of Westchester who are eligible for free or reduced lunch. These backpacks provide non-perishable foods to children who may not have enough food while away from school.

SNAP

We have a SNAP coordinator and expert here at Feeding Westchester, helping reduce hunger in our county by assisting seniors in the community register for SNAP benefits.

Garden Program

Feeding Westchester has many garden sites with in the county. These sites not only provide fresh and nutritious produce, but they also offer vocational and gardening skills, as well as training and education to the community.

Mobile Food Pantry

Our refrigerated Kraft Mobile Pantry truck brings perishable and non-perishable foods to various food deserts around the county daily, bringing food to those who do not have it readily available or nearby.

Neighborhood Food Express

This program delivers large amounts of fresh nutritious food throughout the county. Most of the food delivered and dropped off at each site is produce, which helps those at risk of hunger gain more regular access to fresh, nutritious produce when other resources in the area are not available.

Nutrition Education Programs

There are two nutritionists working for Feeding Westchester. They provide various nutrition workshops to the community, as well as act as a resource for anyone who might need nutrition information.

Senior Grocery Program

Our senior nutrition program helps provide the seniors of Westchester county with healthy and nutritious foods through monthly deliveries.

Fresh Market

The Fresh Market is our "Mobile Farm Stand" that brings a minimum of 10,000lbs of fresh, nutritious produce to designated locations throughout Westchester County.

**For more information about our programs, please call
Feeding Westchester today at 914-923-1100!**

Planning a Successful Food Drive

FIRST: GET READY!

1. **Form a Food Drive Team**
 - Choose a person who will be responsible for communication with the FB4W.
2. **Determine the Type of Food Drive**
 - See next page or visit www.FeedingWestchester.org
3. **Set Your Timeline**
 - Determine the dates which your food drive will start and end then let FB4W know!

SECOND: GET SET!

4. **Establish your collection location(s).** Be sure no food is placed or stored on the ground.
5. **Begin gathering sturdy collection bins** (photocopy boxes work well). You can also call to arrange a time to pick-up collection bins from the FB4W.
6. **Label** boxes with Food Drive information (flyers, etc.)
7. **Promote your Food Drive** – hang posters, hand out flyers, send an email, post it on Facebook, provide participants with a bag to take to the grocery store, hold a competition for which group donates the most food, organize an event where a food donation is the price of admission, plan a special day for the donation of a particular item (e.g., Canned Fruit on Tuesday)
8. **Consider offering a \$\$ donation option-** cash, checks or an online donation at the FB4W website (indicate the Food Drive it relates to).
 - Remember that for each \$1 donated, Feeding Westchester can buy \$4 of food!
9. **Share** the Feeding Westchester website and Facebook page with participants.
10. **Consider additional volunteer projects.**
 - Be sure you have created a volunteer profile online at www.FeedingWestchester.org

NOW GO!!!

11. **Contact the FB4W before the Food Drive ends to arrange delivery options.**
 - FB4W food drive drop off hours: Mon- Fri (8am-3pm)
 - We will provide you with a receipt and thank you letter for the total pounds collected.
 - Make sure you publicize your results to give your participants the satisfaction of a job well done!
12. **Review the event and set the date for next year!**

MOST NEEDED FOOD DRIVE ITEMS:

BEANS (canned or dry)

CEREALS (whole grain)

CANNED MEAT/FISH

MILK (SHELF STABLE)

CANNED MEALS (low sodium)

CANNED VEGETABLES (low sodium)

CANNED or DRIED FRUIT

PEANUT BUTTER

PASTA AND RICE

You can help improve the health of your neighbors. When choosing items for the food drive, please look for labels which read:

** Low Sodium*

** No Salt Added*

** No Sugar Added*

** Unsweetened*

** No Salt Added*

** Reduced Sodium*

** 100% Fruit Juice*

** Whole Grains*

Interested in Volunteering?

Please visit our website at www.FeedingWestchester.org

Click on the "Take Action" tab, and then choose "Volunteer"



