

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 dtatosian@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!

Updated: June 2018

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)

Best-by date

This date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

Packing Codes

These codes enable manufacturers to rotate their stock and locate their products in the event of a recall. Codes appear as a series of letters and/or numbers and refer to the date the product was packed. The codes are not meant for the consumer to interpret as a "Best if Used By" date.

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	6 months
Coffee (ground or whole)	1 year
Coffee creamer, powder	2 years
Hot chocolate	1 year
Juice (bottled or canned)	1 year
Milk (Shelf stable)	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
Soy sauce, teriyaki sauce	3 years
Vinegar	2 years

Worcestershire sauce	2 years
Dry Goods	
Baking mixes (cake mix, pancake mix)	1 year
Baking powder/soda	3 years
Bars (i.e. granola, protein, cereal)	18 months
Dry Goods (continued)	Shelf-Life After Code Date
Beans and lentils, dried	2 years
Bouillon cubes	2 years
Bread, cakes (commercially prepared) <i>**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).</i>	5 days
Candy	1 year
Cereal (hot or cold)	1 year
Cookies	6 months
Cornmeal	1 year
Crackers, pretzels	9 months
Flour	6 months (whole wheat), 1 year (white)
Fruit, dried	6 months
Macaroni and cheese mix	1 year
Nuts (jar or can)	1 year
Nut oils	6 months
Oils (olive, vegetable, canola)	1 year
Pasta, dry	3 years
Peanut butter	18 months
Popcorn, kernels	2 years
Popcorn, popped and pre-bagged	3 months
Popcorn, microwave packets	1 year
Potato chips	2 months
Potatoes (mashed, instant flakes)	1 year
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	2 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	7 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	1 month
Yogurt	2 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, avocados, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) should be at room temperature until ripened, but these items should be refrigerated once ripe.
- Hardy vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash should be stored in cool, dark places outside of the refrigerator. Store your potatoes and onions separately! Onions release a gas that can speed up sprouting in potatoes.
- 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!



Storage of Fruit and Vegetables



Refrigerator

Apples (>7 days)

Apricots

Cantaloupe



Figs
Honeydew

(Unwashed in a Single Layer)

Black Berries

Blueberries



Raspberries

Strawberries

(Unwashed in a Plastic Bag)

Broccoli

Carrots

Cauliflower



Green Onions

Lettuce

(Store in a Paper Bag)

Mushrooms



Okra

Artichokes

Asparagus

Beets

Brussels Sprouts

Cabbage

Celery

Cherries

Grapes

Green Beans

Herbs (not Basil)



Kale

Lima Beans

Leafy Vegetables

Leeks

Plums

Spinach

Sprouts

Summer Squash

Yellow Squash

Zucchini

Countertop

Apples (<7 days)

Bananas



Tomatoes

Basil

Cucumbers

Eggplant

Garlic

Ginger

Grapefruit

Jicama

Lemons

Limes



Mangoes

Oranges

Papaya

Peppers

Persimmons

Pineapple

Plantains

Pomegranates

Watermelon



Cool Dry Place

Acorn Squash

Butternut Squash

Potatoes*

Winter Squash

Pumpkins

Onions*

Sweet Potatoes

Spaghetti Squash

***Store away from each other!**

Counter/Fridge

(Ripen on Counter, Then Refrigerate)

Avocados

Nectarines

Plums



Pears

Peaches

Kiwi



High Ethylene Producers!

Keep away from other fresh produce to slow down ripening/spoilage

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 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.

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.

Green Thumb Produce Program

This produce program provides a yearly total of 1.5 million pounds of fresh, nutritious, top-quality produce which is distributed to our agency partners in 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 FW.
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 FW 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 FW.
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 FW's website (indicate the Food Drive it relates to).
 - Remember that for each \$1 donated, FW can source \$4 worth of food!
9. Share FW's 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 FW before the Food Drive ends to arrange delivery options.
 - FW's 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 “How to Help” tab, and then choose “Donate Time”



