



FOOD DATE GUIDELINES

- Below are some broad and basic food extension guidelines for common food categories*.
- We use package dates as a source of information to help us decide how long we will distribute food.
- **Dates on packages are not always the best method for determining the quality of food - smell and sight is also valuable.**
- These are helpful guidelines for any consumer, not just clients of food pantries.

	MILK	CHEESE - SOFT*	CHEESE - MEDIUM*	CHEESE - HARD*	EGGS	CREAM CHEESE, YOGURT, SOUR CREAM, COTTAGE CHEESE
	7 DAYS	14 DAYS	1 MONTH	6-12 MONTHS	5 WEEKS	14 DAYS

MEAT (Frozen)
SEE REVERSE

***Soft Cheese** (e.g. Brie, Goat, Ricotta)
***Medium Cheese** (e.g. Mozzarella, Muenster, Havarti, Shredded, Cheddar)
***Hard Cheese** (e.g. Aged Cheddar, Swiss, Block Parmesan)

	PREPARED FOODS (e.g. Refrigerated Soups, Salsas, Guacamole, Chicken/Egg/Tuna Salad, Hummus)	DELI MEAT (Factory Packaged)	DELI MEAT (Local Deli Sliced)	TOFU
	7 DAYS	14 DAYS	5 DAYS	5 WEEKS

	CUT FRUITS & VEGETABLES	BAGGED SALAD MIXES/GREENS	WHOLE PRODUCE	REFRIGERATED JUICE (Pasteurized)
	4 DAYS	5 DAYS	VISUAL INSPECTION	7 DAYS

	CANS	BOXED GOODS	BABY FOOD/FORMULA
	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	NO EXTENSION

	BREADS/ BAKERY	CAKES/ SWEETS
	3 WEEKS	7 DAYS

If it is not on this list, other recommended references are: UW Extension "Keep or Toss" (SecondHarvestMadison.org/KeepToss) or FMI FoodKeeper (SecondHarvestMadison.org/FoodKeeper).

With an exception of infant formula, if the date passes during home storage, a product should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten. For more information, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.

For questions, please contact Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin or the location where you received your food.
SecondHarvestMadison.org

*Please note that some manufacturers have requests for shorter distribution, e.g. Dannon requests consumption of their yogurt within 7 days past date.

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FROZEN MEATS


BEEF, LAMB, PORK, VEAL

	STEAKS	CHOPS	ROASTS	VARIETY/ORGAN MEAT	GROUND/ STEW
	4-12 MONTHS	4-12 MONTHS	4-12 MONTHS	3-4 MONTHS	3-4 MONTHS


HAM

	4-12 MONTHS
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CHICKEN, TURKEY

	WHOLE	PARTS	GROUND
	12 MONTHS	9 MONTHS	3-4 MONTHS

FISH

	LEAN FISH (i.e. Cod, Flounder, Haddock, Halibut, Pollock)	FATTY FISH (i.e. Bluefish, Salmon, Tuna)	SHRIMP/ SCALLOPS	CRAB LEGS	SMOKED FISH
	4-12 MONTHS	4-12 MONTHS	4-12 MONTHS	4-12 MONTHS	3-4 MONTHS

FROZEN FOODS - QUALITY, SAFETY, COLOR CHANGES

Freezer Burn - Freezer burn does not make food unsafe, merely dry in spots. It appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and is caused by air coming in contact with the surface of the food. Cut freezer-burned portions away either before or after cooking the food. Heavily freezer-burned foods may have to be discarded for quality reasons.

White Frozen Patches - White dried patches indicate freezer burn. The meat is still safe to eat, but the freezer burned parts will be tough and tasteless and can be trimmed away if desired

Meat - The bright red color of meat as purchased usually turns dark or pale brown depending on its variety. This may be due to lack of oxygen, freezer burn or abnormally long storage.

Poultry - Freezing doesn't usually cause color changes in poultry. However, the bones and the meat near them can become dark. Bone darkening results when pigment seeps through the porous bones of young poultry into the surrounding tissues when the poultry meat is frozen and thawed.

Vegetables - The dulling of color in frozen vegetables and cooked foods is usually the result of excessive drying due to improper packaging or over-lengthy storage.

Freezer Storage Time - Because freezing keeps food safe almost indefinitely, recommended storage times are for quality only. Refer to the freezer storage chart at the end of this document, which lists optimum freezing times for best quality. If a food is not listed on the chart, you may determine its quality after thawing. First check the odor. Some foods will develop a rancid or off odor when frozen too long and should be discarded.

Safe Thawing - Never thaw foods in a garage, basement, car, dishwasher or plastic garbage bag; out on the kitchen counter, outdoors or on the porch. These methods can leave your foods unsafe to eat. There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. For faster thawing, place food in a leak proof plastic bag and immerse it in cold water. When microwave-defrosting food, plan to cook it immediately after thawing because some areas of the food may become warm and begin to cook during microwaving.

Refreezing - Once food is thawed in the refrigerator, it is safe to refreeze it without cooking, although there may be a loss of quality due to the moisture lost through thawing.