Don't Let the Date Be the First Thing You Check

Before you throw food away, check these four things.

Step 1: Is the package okay?

If the package is damaged, don't trust the date. Throw it away if the package is:

- Bulging or leaking
- Missing its seal
- Deeply dented
- Torn or punctured

Step 2: Has it been stored safely?

Think about how the food has been stored.

- Has it stayed refrigerated or frozen if it needed to?
- Was it left out for more than two hours? (One hour if it's over 90°F)

If the answer is yes, don't rely on the date.

Step 3: Does it look normal?

If food has obvious signs of spoilage, don't eat it—even if it's before the date.

Signs of spoilage can include:

- Mold
- Sour or unusual smell
- Slimy texture
- Swollen container

Step 4: Then check the date.

Most dates tell you about quality only. These foods can still be safely eaten if they have been stored safely.

- Best By / Use By: Best flavor or texture, still safe to eat if stored safely
- Sell By: Helps stores inventory

Exception: Infant formula should not be used after the use-by date due to federal regulations.

***Remember:** No single clue tells the whole story. Look at the package, how the food was stored, its condition, and the date before deciding to throw it away.*

Store Food Well. Get More From Your Food.

Discover more food storage tips and guides at UseFoodWell.org

Use Food Well

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