

# IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

Volume: 2017 Issue: 7

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Lubbock County \* PO Box 10536 \* Lubbock, TX 79408  
 916 Main, Suite 201 Lubbock, TX 79401 \* 775-1740 \* Fax 775-1758 \* <http://lubbock.agrilife.org>

## *Is this Food Still Safe to Eat? Frequently Asked Questions*

### Is it safe to use food from dented cans?



If a can has a small dent but is otherwise in good shape, the food should be safe to eat.

If a can containing food has a small dent, but is otherwise in good shape, the food should be safe to eat. Discard deeply dented cans. A deep dent is one that you can lay your finger into. Deep dents often have sharp points. A sharp dent on either the top or side seam can damage the seam and allow bacteria to enter the can. Discard any can with a deep dent on any seam.

Source: USDA/FSIS. \*Shelf-Stable Food Safety. Accessed 2/19/17 at <http://bit.ly/2lk1UvO>

### Is it safe to use food from rusted cans?

Discard heavily rusted cans. Cans that are heavily rusted can have tiny holes in them, allowing bacteria to enter. Surface rust that you can remove by rubbing with your finger or a paper towel is not serious. You can keep these canned foods. If you open the cans and there is any rust inside, do not eat the food. Rust (oxidized iron) is not safe to eat.

Source: USDA/FSIS. Shelf-Stable Food Safety. Accessed 2/19/17 at <http://bit.ly/2lk1UvO>

### How can you tell if food is safe after a power outage?

**Keep the freezer door closed to keep cold air inside.** Don't open the door any more than necessary. A full freezer will stay at safe temperatures about 2 days; a half-full freezer about 1 day. If your freezer is not full, group packages so they form an "igloo" to protect each other. If you think the power will be out for several days, try to find some dry ice. Keep dry ice wrapped and do not touch it with your bare hands. Use cubed ice or block ice in the refrigerator.

**Even if food has started to thaw, foods can be safely kept in the freezer.** The foods in your freezer that partially or completely thaw before power is restored may be safely refrozen if they still contain ice crystals or are 40°F or below. You will have to evaluate each item separately. When in doubt, throw it out.

In general, refrigerated items should be safe up to 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40°F for 2 hours or more. Also discard any other food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch.

**Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer at all times.** This will remove the guesswork of just how cold the unit is because it will give you the exact temperature. The key to determining the safety of foods in the refrigerator and freezer is knowing how cold they are. The refrigerator temperature should be at 40°F or below; the freezer, 0°F or lower.

More detailed information, along with a chart that tells which foods may be saved and which should be thrown out, may be found in *Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency* at <http://bit.ly/2mbriac>

Source: USDA/FSIS Food Safety and Security: What Consumers Need to Know, Accessed 2/22/17 at <http://bit.ly/2lMs5h3>

\*United States Department of Agriculture/Food Safety and Inspection Service



Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer to help assure the safety of your food. (Image courtesy of USDA/FSIS image library)

**BEST IF USED BY:  
DEC 27 2019**

New voluntary “Best If Used by” labeling will describe product quality, where the product may not taste or perform as expected but is safe to use or consume.

(NOTE: Manufacturers have until July 2018 to make the change. As these standards are voluntary, there is no guarantee that every company will adopt them. In some states, there may be labeling regulations that preempt the industry standards. Following are some current phrases that are used and that will continue to appear until labels have been switched over.)

### What do food product date labels mean?

In a new industry-wide effort to reduce consumer confusion about product date labels, grocery manufacturers and retailers have joined together to adopt standard wording on packaging about the quality and safety of products.

Currently, more than 10 different date labels on packages – such as Sell By, Use By, Expires On, Best Before, Better if Used By or Best By – can result in confused consumers discarding a safe or usable product after the date on the package.

The new voluntary initiative streamlines the myriad date labels on consumer products packaging down to just two standard phrases. “**BEST if Used By**” describes product quality, where the product may not taste or perform as expected but is safe to use or consume. “**USE By**” applies to the few products that are highly perishable and/or have a food safety concern over time; these products should be consumed by the date listed on the package – and disposed of after that date.

The new initiative for common phrasing is led by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), the two major trade associations for retailers and consumer products manufacturing.

*Source: News Release, Grocery Manufacturers of America, 2/15/2017. Grocery Industry launches New Initiative to Reduce Consumer Confusion on Product Date Labels. Accessed 2/23/2017 at <http://bit.ly/2lxTVtk>*

#### Some current commonly used food label date phrases

- A “**Best if Used By/Before**” indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A “**Sell-By**” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.
- A “**Use-By**” date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula as described below.

Federal regulations require a “Use-By” date on the product label of infant formula under inspection of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Consumption by this date ensures the formula contains not less than the quantity of each nutrient as described on the label. Formula must maintain an acceptable quality to pass through an ordinary bottle nipple.

The “Use-By” date is selected by the manufacturer, packer or distributor of the product on the basis of product analysis throughout its shelf life, tests, or other information. It is also based on the conditions of handling, storage, preparation, and use printed on the label. Do not buy or use baby formula after its “Use-By” date.

*Source: USDA/FSIS Food Safety and Security: Food Product Dating. Accessed 2/23/2017 at <http://bit.ly/2l3GO32>*

Article source: Authored by or Adapted from Alice Henneman, MS, RDN, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Food Reflections Newsletter

For More Information contact: E. Kay Davis, CEA-FCS, Lubbock County, 806-775-1740