

Food Dating Information

Is it safe to eat? What does food dating really mean? You aren't the only one asking these questions! With the exception of some infant and baby food, product dating is not required nor regulated by any government agency. Dates on food packages are determined by the manufacturer and act as a guideline for freshness and quality, not food safety. There are three types of food dating, each meaning something different:

| Type of Dating | How Used? | What Does It Mean? | SHH Tip |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| Sell-by dates | Found on perishables such as meat and milk. Indicates how long a product should be displayed for sale at retailer | Buy the product before sell by date. Use it or freeze it (if appropriate) right away. | For example, SHH repacked retail meats are put through a deep freeze just before their sell-by date, which prolongs their life by several months. |
| Use-by dates | Found on shelf stable food such as cereal. Used as a recommendation for best flavor and quality. | Not a purchase-by or food safety date. After long periods of time shelf stable food may lose flavor and quality. However, unless contaminants have entered the food it is most likely safe to eat. | Although food is generally safe years after this date, your program may want to set a policy around what dates are acceptable to give to clients. |
| Expiration dates | Generally will not be seen on food items with a few exceptions. | Dates prefixed with EXP should be obeyed. The only exception to this is federally graded eggs; they are safe for 3-5 weeks after expiration date. | Be sure to throw out infant formula and baby foods that are expired immediately. |