

# GUIDELINE FOR DISTRIBUTING FOOD – PAST THE BEST BEFORE DATE

	 TIME FRAME PAST BEST BEFORE	 PRODUCE	 JUICES AND SOFT DRINKS	 BREAD & BAKERY	 PACKAGED GRAINS, CEREALS & BAKED GOODS	 MEAT & SEAFOOD	 DELI MEATS	 PREPARED FOODS	 MILK AND NON-DAIRY ALTERNATIVES	 CULTURED DAIRY	 CHEESE	 FATS	 GENERAL GROCERY (SHELF STABLE)	 NON-FOOD	 INFANT FORMULA AND NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS
PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS	Fruit / Vegetables – Whole, Uncut, Unpeeled, Undamaged	Fruit & Vegetable Juices & Soft Drinks	Loaves, Rolls, Bagels, Muffins	Granola, Flours, Rices, Dry Pastas, Cookies, Crackers, Breakfast/Lunch Cereal Bars	Packaged and Bulk Meats, Poultry, Fish	Deli Meats, Sausages	Prepared meals, fresh pasta, cooked meats, Mixed Salads, Soups, Stews, Cut produce	Milk (Fresh, Powdered, Canned, UHT tetrapak); Soy & Almond Beverages	Yogurt, kefir, sour cream	Cottage cheese, cream & soft cheeses, hard cheeses	Butter, Margarine; Cooking Oils (most)	May include: Canned pastas, canned meats/fish, Tomato Sauces, condiments, etc.	Laundry Detergent, Mixed Product Pallets, Deodorants, Body Washes, Diapers, Infant Wipes	<b>Note:</b> These products contain Expiry Dates – not Best Before Dates	
ROOM TEMPERATURE	Fresh, whole 1 – 7 days	Less than 2 hours (If refrigeration needed)	Up to 1 Week	NA	Less than 2 hours	Less than 2 hours (If refrigeration needed)	Less than 2 hours	Less than 2 hours (If refrigeration needed)	Less than 2 hours	Less than 2 hours	Less than 2 hours (If refrigeration needed)	NA	NA		
REFRIGERATED	Fresh, whole; leafy greens 1 day – 2 months (depending on produce and condition)	7 – 10 days (If refrigeration needed)	2 Weeks	NA	3 – 4 days whole pieces; 1 – 2 days ground; 1 – 2 days seafood/fish	3 – 5 deli counter; 7 days commercially package	2 – 3 days meal items; 3 – 4 days cut fruits and vegetables	1 – 2 Days (If refrigeration needed)	1 – 2 weeks cultured	1 – 2 weeks cottage cheese; 3 – 6 months hard blocks; 1 – 2 months soft blocks	1 – 5 Months	NA	NA		
FROZEN	1 Year	1 Year	3 Months	NA	Beef, lamb pork, veal, whole poultry 12 months; poultry pieces 6 months; ground meat 2–3 months; fish 2–6 Months; and shellfish 2–4 months	2 – 3 Months	4 Months	6 months; texture may change	1 – 3 months cultured; texture will change	6 – 12 months hard cheese blocks; 3 – 6 month soft blocks	6 – 12 Months	NA	NA		
CANNED / JARRED / BOTTLED	NA	1 Year	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1 Year	NA	NA	6 – 12 Months (shelf stable oils)	1 – 2 Year	1 Year		
BOXED / BAGGED	NA	6 – 12 Months	Up to 1 Week	6 – 12 Months	NA	NA	NA	UHT – 6 months, Powdered*	NA	NA	NA	6 – 12 Months	1 Year		

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE PAST EXPIRY DATE

**\* Milk powder:** Temperature is a critical quality factor for milk powder. Keep milk powder cool.

**Best Before Date:** This gives consumers information as to when the product is at its best – with sensory qualities as acceptable as the day it was made when stored under appropriate conditions and packaging is intact. Best Before dates indicate the shelf life of foods. They are not indicators of food safety. Some manufacturers changed their wording in 2018 to “Better Before”.

**Expiry Date:** Tells consumers that the product may not be providing them with the nutrients expected of the product and they should no longer consume it after that date.  
**Products with Expiry Dates must not be shared past the date on the packaging.**

**Products Include:** Infant Formula (Canned or Boxed, Liquid or Powdered), and many Nutritional Supplements and Meal Replacements (Canned, Boxed, or Ready to Use, Liquid or Powdered). Note that baby foods for older babies and toddlers have Best Before dates, not expiry dates.

### Food Products and their ability to be shared should always be based on:

- 1) Ensuring the product has been handled safely (ie. Chilled product is kept chilled).
- 2) Assessing all packaging for integrity (i.e., dents, creases, etc.) based on Food Banks Canada Safe Food Handling Standards.
- 3) That the product is at a level of quality (e.g., taste and smell) that is still worth sharing.
- 4) That the Manufacturer’s Branding will not be compromised if the product is shared.

**NOTE:** This information is to be used as a guide only. It was developed based on general knowledge, industry practices and the understanding that best before dates are about sensory quality.

### FOR REFERENCE:

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Date Labelling on Pre-packaged Foods, Date Modified: 2013-07-07, Available at: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets/labelling-food-packaging-and-storage/date/eng/1332357469487/1332357545633>
- M.A. Freitas, J.C. Costa, Shelf life determination using sensory evaluation scores: A general Weibull modeling approach, Computers & Industrial Engineering, Vol. 51, No. 4, 2006, pp. 652-670.
- A. Giménez, F. Ares, G. Ares, Sensory shelf-life estimation: A review of current methodological approaches, Food Research International, Vol. 49, No 1, 2012, pp. 311-325.
- S. Guerra, C. Lagazio, L. Manzocco, et al., Risks and pitfalls of sensory data analysis for shelf life prediction: Data simulation applied to the case of coffee, Food Science and Technology, Vol. 41, No. 10, 2008, pp. 2070-2078.
- Stilltasty.com and EatByDate.com for additional guidelines.
- Utah State University Cooperative Extension Service, Food Storage: Dried Milk, Available at: <http://extension.usu.edu/foodstorage/html/dried-milk>