

What is product dating?

“Open Dating” on a food product is a date stamped on a product’s package to help the store determine how long to display the product for sale. It can also help the purchaser to know the time limit to purchase or use the product at its best quality. It is not a safety date. After the date passes, while it may not be of best quality, refrigerated products should still be safe if handled properly and kept at 40 °F or below. If product has a “use-by” date, follow that date. If product has a “sell-by” date or no date, cook or freeze the product as soon as possible.

Types of Dates

- A **“Sell-By”** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- A **“Best if Used By (or Before)”** date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A **“Use-By”** date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- **“Closed or coded dates”** are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

What do can codes mean?

Cans must exhibit a packing code to enable tracking of the product in interstate commerce. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as to locate their products in the event of a recall.

These codes, which appear as a series of letters and/or numbers, might refer to the date or time of manufacture. They aren’t meant for the consumer to interpret as “use-by” dates. There is no book or web site that tells how to translate the codes into dates.

How long does canned food remain edible and retain its nutritional content?

Most canned food has a shelf life of at least two (2) years from the date of processing. Canned food retains its safety and nutritional value well beyond two years, but it may have some variation in quality, such as a change of color or texture. Food safety is not an issue in products kept on the shelf in moderate temperatures (75° F or less) and in a cool, dry place and the cans are not dented and in good condition.

What about frozen foods?

Once a perishable product is frozen at the proper temperature, it does not matter if the date expires because food kept frozen continuously is safe indefinitely. Daily Deals Food Outlet freezes perishable items before the date on the package which extends the life of the product. Packaging is important to the quality and appearance of frozen foods. Products exposed to air can develop “freezer burn”, which does not affect the safety of the product, but can impact taste and quality.

To learn more about product dating, please visit the USDA by clicking [here](#).