

BECAUSE IT TAKES MORE THAN FOOD TO FEED THE HUNGRY



SHELF LIFE OF FOOD BANK PRODUCTS

Long Island Cares- The Harry Chapin Food Bank often distributes food items after the date on the package. Food manufacturers use different date codes to insure that consumers receive their product at peak quality. *Once a product is past code date, many manufacturers donate it to food banks.* Food Bank staff monitors this food to ensure that the quality remains good. **This food is still safe to eat!**

DATES: What do the dates on food packages and medicines mean?

The only foods that are required by federal law to have expiration dates are **baby food, infant formula, and over-the-counter medications. No medicines should be distributed after the expiration date.** The Food Bank *does not* distribute baby food and formula past its expiration date. However, some products designed for babies such as juice, fruit snacks and cookies or biscuits *can be distributed past their date* and are safe to eat. Many canned and boxed products are safe to eat long after the date on the container, and the shelf life of refrigerated and frozen foods can be extended if they are handled and stored properly. Once a perishable item is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires—food kept frozen continuously can be safe for 2-18 months depending on the type of food/item. However, the quality slowly deteriorates over time. Here are some code dates you may see on food packages:

“Expiration Date” (Examples: “Expires 2/15/10” or “Do not use after 2/15/10”)

- **Look for it on:** Baby food and formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder.
- **What it means:** Do not distribute infant formula, vitamins, or medicines after the expiration date!
Yeast and baking powder work less after expiration but are safe to eat.

“Pack Date” (Examples: “Packed on 9/23/11” or “192 VIG 2111”)

- **Look for it on:** Canned food, crackers, cookies, spices.
- **What it means:** This is the date the food was packaged. A code is often used that cannot be understood by the general public. Usually this food is of good quality and safe to eat a long time past the date.

“Sell by” Date (Examples: “Sell by May 16, 2011”. Also called Pull Date)

- **Look for it on:** Refrigerated foods such as milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, lunch meat, packaged salad mixes.
- **What it means:** The store must sell these foods before the “sell date” listed and often donates these foods when they are close to date. If the food has been handled properly it is still safe to eat and quality is good. Food Bank staff monitors this food to ensure that the quality remains good. (*Example:* some refrigerated dairy, meat, poultry, fruit & vegetable products can be stored frozen before the “sell by date” to extend their ability to be consumed at a later date.

“Use by” or “Quality Date” (Examples: “Best if used by 3/1/12” or “Use Before 3/1/12”)

- **Look for it on:** Crackers, cookies, cold cereals, and other dry, shelf stable food.
- **What it means:** This date is the manufacturer’s recommendation for how long the food will be a peak quality. After the quality date, the food is still safe to eat but slowly begins to lose nutrients and the quality begins to lessen.

Below is a list of common food bank foods explaining the approximate “shelf life”, or how long a food product is good past its code or expiration date...

| <i>SHELF STABLE PRODUCT</i> | <i>SHELF LIFE AFTER CODE OR EXPIRATION DATE</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>BEVERAGES</i> | |
| Coffee: Instant, ground | 2 years |
| Milk: Shelf Stable UHT | 1 year |
| Non-fat dry | 18 months |
| Evaporated | 1 year |
| Soy or Rice | 3 months |
| Water | 3 years |
| <i>BREAD/GRAIN PRODUCTS</i> | |
| Toaster Pastries | 6 months fruit filled |
| Flour: Cake or all purpose | 1 year |
| whole wheat and whole grain fours | 6 months |
| Macaroni and cheese | 2 years |
| Pasta: dry, without egg | 2 years |
| dry, with egg | 2 years |
| Rice: white | 2 years |
| Brown | 1 year |
| Rice or pasta meals (ex: skillet dinners) | 18 months |
| <i>CANNED FOODS</i> | |
| Beans: all types | 2-5 years |
| Low acid foods such as: | 2-5 years |
| gravy, pasta, stews, cream sauces | 2-5 years |
| soup & broth that is not tomato based | 2-5 years |
| High acid foods such as: | 12-18 months |
| tomatoes, tomato soup, tomato-based pasta sauces | 12-18 months |
| Meat: beef, chicken, pork, turkey | 2-5 years |
| Fish: salmon, tuna, sardines | 2-5 years |
| <i>MISCELLANEOUS</i> | |
| Oil: olive, vegetable, cooking or salad | 6 months |
| Peanut butter | 6-9 months |

For a more complete list of foods please visit our web page www.licares.org
 Go to our site map page then click on the Recipe/Nutrition/Food safety page to find the link for the USDA/Food Marketing Institute “**Food Keeper Brochure**” You can read this online or print it out for your convenience.

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