

FN-AN.001

WHAT'S THAT DATE MEAN?

Except for infant formula, manufacturers are not required to print use by dates, sell by dates, and best by dates on food labels. Manufacturers voluntarily print these dates on packages to indicate the date the food will retain top quality and flavor. They are freshness and quality dates, not food safety dates. The food is not necessarily spoiled or unsafe after this date but may have lost some of its freshness and nutritional value.

Use by – This is the last recommended date to use the food at its peak quality according to the manufacturer. After this date, the quality of the food begins to go down.

Infant formula must be labeled with a “Use by” date. This date is based on nutrient content testing, and the nutritional value of the formula cannot be guaranteed after this date. The date can usually be found on the bottom of the container.



Best by – This date is similar to the use by date, and many times you will see them combined in a statement such as “best if used by.” This date tells the consumer when a product will be at its best flavor and quality. After this date, the food is not necessarily spoiled, it is just of lower quality.



Sell by – This date indicates the last recommended day of sale. Retail stores should pull products after the sell by date; however, it is legal to sell food after this date. Most food is safe to eat after the sell by date as long as there are no signs of spoilage and the food has been stored, handled, and prepared properly.



Freeze by – This date indicates when you should freeze a product to maintain the best quality.

You should cook or place fresh meat, fish, and poultry in the freezer for longer storage within one or two days of you buying and storing it in your home refrigerator. Once frozen, the date does not matter.



REFERENCE

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>

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