

# Food Storage Guide

## Answers the Question ...

**How long can I store**

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**before its quality deteriorates or it's no longer safe to eat?**

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**Like many answers, this one depends on several factors:**

the type of food, length of time the food sat on the store shelf before you bought it, the temperature of the food while it was in the store, its packaging, how efficiently your refrigerator or freezer runs, and the temperature in your cupboards.

While you can't control all these factors, there are some precautions you can take. For example, always read the package labels and buy the products with the most distant expiration dates.

When you're shopping, buy perishable foods, like meats, last. In fact, you may want to organize your shopping list so your perishables are at the bottom. At home, put purchase dates on packaging and rotate your food supplies on a regular basis. Be sure to always use the "first in, first out" rule.

This publication provides handling tips and recommendations for storing food in your cupboards, refrigerator or freezer. Beyond the guidelines, though, you still have to rely on some old-fashioned common sense.

**And remember the most basic of rules:  
When in doubt, throw it out.**

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# Cupboard Storage Chart

- Store foods in cool cabinets and away from appliances which produce heat.
- Many staples and canned foods have a relatively long shelf life, but buy only what you can expect to use within the time recommended in the chart. Date food packages and use the oldest first. Foods stored for longer than recommended times or beyond date on the package may change quality, color and flavor.
- Buy fresh-looking packages. Dusty cans or torn labels can indicate old stock. Do not purchase dented or bulging cans.

## Staples

FOOD	STORAGE	HANDLING HINTS
<b>Baking powder</b>	18 months or expiration date on can	Keep dry and covered
<b>Baking soda</b>	2 years	Keep dry and covered
<b>Bouillon cubes or granules</b>	1 year	Keep dry and covered
<b>Bread crumbs (dried)</b>	6 months	Keep dry and covered
<b>Bread, rolls</b>	3 days	
<b>Bulgur</b>	6 to 12 months	
<b>Cereals</b>		
– ready-to-eat, unopened	6 to 12 months	Check date on package
– ready-to-eat, opened	2 to 3 months	Refold package liner tightly after opening
<b>Hot cereal (dry)</b>	6 months	
<b>Chocolate</b>		
– premelted	12 months	Keep cool
– semisweet	2 years	Keep cool
– unsweetened	18 months	Keep cool
<b>Cocoa</b>	Indefinitely	
<b>Chocolate syrup</b>		
– unopened	2 years	
– opened	6 months	Cover tightly; refrigerate after opening
<b>Cocoa mixes</b>	8 months	Cover tightly
<b>Coffee</b>		
– cans, unopened	2 years	Refrigerate after opening; keep tightly closed. Use dry measuring spoon.
– cans, opened	2 weeks	Can be frozen to extend shelf life.
– instant, unopened	1 to 2 years	
– instant, opened	2 months	
<b>Coffee lighteners</b>		
– unopened, dry	9 months	Keep tightly covered
– opened, dry	6 months	Keep tightly covered
<b>Cornmeal</b>	12 months	Keep tightly covered; can be frozen for indefinite storage
<b>Cornstarch</b>	18 months	Keep tightly covered
<b>Flour</b>		Can be frozen for indefinite storage
– white	6 to 8 months	Keep in airtight container; keep refrigerated
– whole wheat	6 to 8 months	Store in airtight container
<b>Gelatin (all types)</b>	18 months	Keep in original container
<b>Grits</b>	12 months	Store in airtight container
<b>Honey</b>	12 months	Cover tightly; if crystallizes, warm opened jar in pan of hot water

FOOD	STORAGE	HANDLING HINTS
<b>Staples – continued</b>		
Jellies, jams	12 months	Cover tightly; refrigerate after opening
<b>Molasses</b> – unopened – opened	1 to 2 years 6 months	Keep tightly covered. Refrigerate to extend storage life.
<b>Marshmallow cream</b> – unopened	3 to 4 months	Cover tightly; refrigerate after opening to extend storage life. Serve at room temperature
<b>Marshmallows</b>	2 to 3 months	Keep in airtight container
<b>Mayonnaise</b>	2 to 3 months	Check package date; refrigerate after opening
<b>Milk</b> – condensed or evaporated, • unopened – nonfat dry • unopened • opened	12 months 6 months 3 months	Refrigerate after opening  Store in airtight container
<b>Pasta</b> – spaghetti, macaroni, etc. – egg noodles	2 years 6 months	Once opened, store in airtight container
<b>Pectin</b> – liquid or dry, unopened – liquid, opened	1 year or expiration date 1 month	Recap and refrigerate
<b>Rice</b> – white – brown, wild – flavored or herb	1 to 2 years 6 to 12 months 6 months	Keep tightly covered
<b>Salad dressings</b> – bottled, unopened – bottled, opened – made from mix	10 to 12 months 3 months 2 weeks	Refrigerate after opening Refrigerate prepared dressing
<b>Vegetable oils</b> – unopened – opened	6 months 1 to 3 months	Refrigeration not needed; store in a cool, dark place in tightly closed container
<b>Shortenings (solid)</b>	8 months	Refrigeration not needed; store in a cool, dark place in tightly closed container
<b>Sugar</b> – brown – confectioners – granulated – artificial sweeteners	4 months 18 months 2 years 2 years	Put in airtight container Put in airtight container Cover tightly Cover tightly
<b>Corn syrup</b>	Up to 3 years	Keep tightly covered; refrigerate to extend storage life. Remove any light surface mold and heat to 180 F before use
<b>Pancake syrup</b>	3 to 4 months	Refrigerate after opening
<b>Tea</b> – bags – instant – loose	18 months 2 years 2 years	Put in airtight container Cover tightly Put in airtight container
<b>Vinegar</b> – unopened – opened	2 years 12 months	Keep tightly covered. Slightly cloudy appearance doesn't affect quality. Distilled vinegar keeps longer than cider vinegar.



# Refrigerator/Freezer Storage Chart

- Use foil, plastic wrap, plastic bags or airtight containers designed for use with food for packaging foods for refrigerator storage. Moisture- and vapor-proof materials are best.
- Clean your refrigerator regularly to reduce food odors. Remove spoiled foods immediately so decay cannot pass to other foods.
- Store foods at cool temperatures. From 34 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit is best. Perishable foods stored at temperatures above 40 F spoil rapidly. Check temperatures with a refrigerator thermometer or an outdoor thermometer.
- Use foods quickly. Don't depend on maximum storage time.
- Freeze foods in containers or materials designed for freezer storage.
- Keep your freezer clean and at 0 F or lower.

## Breads, Pastries, Cakes

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS
Unbaked rolls and bread	2 to 3 weeks	1 month	Longer storage causes yeast to become inactivated and the gluten weakened
Partially baked cinnamon rolls		2 months	
Baked quick breads		2 months	
Baked muffins		6 to 12 months	
Baked breads with no preservatives	2 to 3 weeks	2 to 3 months	Refrigeration storage is recommended to inhibit mold growth
Unfrosted doughnuts		2 to 4 months	
Waffles		1 month	
Unbaked fruit pies	1 to 2 days	2 to 4 months	
Baked fruit pies	2 to 3 days	6 to 8 months	
Pumpkin or chiffon pies	2 to 3 days	1 to 2 months	
Baked cookies		6 to 12 months	Cookies will keep two to three weeks in airtight container in the cupboard. Cookies do not need to be refrigerated.
Freezer pie shells (eg. <i>Pet Ritz</i> )		12 months	If package is open and not used, rewrap and freeze remaining crust and use within two months.
Cookie dough		3 months	
Unbaked cakes (batter)		1 month	Use double-action baking powder if batter is frozen.
Frosted baked cakes		1 month	
Unfrosted baked cakes		2 to 4 months	
Angel cakes		6 to 12 months	
Fruit cakes		6 to 12 months	
Refrigerated biscuits, rolls, pastries, cookie dough	Expiration date on label	*	Don't store in the refrigerator door because temperature fluctuation and jarring lower quality.

\*Freezing not recommended

# Dairy Products – Real and Substitutes

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS
<b>Butter</b>	1 to 2 weeks	12 months	Wrap or cover tightly
<b>Margarine</b>	4 to 6 months	12 months	Wrap or cover tightly
<b>Buttermilk</b>	3 to 5 days	*	Cover tightly. The flavor is not affected if buttermilk separates; remix before serving. Check the date on the carton; buttermilk will keep several days after that date.
<b>Cheese</b>			
– cottage, ricotta	5 to 7 days	4 weeks	Keep all cheese tightly packaged in moisture-resistant wrap. If the outside of hard cheese gets slightly moldy, just cut away cheese ½ inch beneath and beside the mold; it won't affect the flavor. If the cheese is covered with heavy mold, discard the entire block. For longer storage, freeze. Freezing will affect the texture and possible taste. Cream cheese becomes crumbly when frozen; may be used for cooking. Keep refrigerated. Use within one week of the "best when purchased by" date.  Refrigerate after opening; see cupboard storage chart  Refrigerate slices of processed cheese and cheese food. Refrigerate loaves and jars after opened. Most squeeze packages and aerosol cans don't need refrigeration, but check label. Keep refrigerated. Use within two days of the "best when purchased by" date on the label.
– cream, Neufchâtel	2 weeks	*	
– hard and wax-coated in large pieces, Cheddar, Edam, Gouda, Swiss, brick			
• unopened	2 to 3 months	6 to 8 months	
• opened	2 to 3 weeks		
– sliced	2 weeks		
– soft cream cheese	5 to 6 days		
	(after opening)		
– Parmesan Romano-grated (opened)	more than 12 months		
– process (opened)	3 to 4 weeks	6 to 8 months	
– shredded cheeses			
<b>Dips</b>			
– commercial	2 weeks		Keep tightly covered
– homemade	2 days		Keep tightly covered
<b>Milk</b>			
– evaporated (opened)	4 to 5 days	*	Keep covered
– homogenized, reconstituted dry nonfat, skimmed	5 days	*	Keep containers tightly closed. To prevent spoilage, don't return unused milk to original container.
– sweetened, condensed (opened)	4 to 5 days	*	Keep covered
<b>Sour cream</b>	2 weeks	*	Keep covered
<b>Whipped topping</b>			
– in aerosol can	3 months	*	Keep covered May be refrozen four or five times if thawed in refrigerator
– prepared from mix	3 days	*	
– (eg. <i>Cool Whip</i> )	2 to 3 weeks	14 months	
<b>Yogurt</b>	7 to 10 days	*	Keep covered and refrigerated. Follow the "use by" date on the package, or up to two weeks after the "sell by" date. Yogurt may separate when frozen.
<b>Eggs</b>			
– in shell	3 weeks	*	Store covered. Keep the small end down to center the yolks. Store in covered container; for longer storage, freeze.
– whites or yolks	2 to 4 days	1 year	
– hard cooked	1 week	*	
<b>Eggs – containing products</b>			
– custards, custard-filled pastries, cream pies	1 to 2 days	*	
<b>Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes</b>			
– opened	3 days	*	
– unopened	10 days	1 year	

\*Freezing not recommended

# Fruits and Juices

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer* at 0 F	COMMENTS
Apples	1 month	8 to 12 months	Discard bruised or decayed fruit. Don't wash before storing because moisture encourages spoilage. Store in the crisper or moisture-resistant bag or wrap.
Apricots	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	
Avocados	5 days	8 to 12 months	
Bananas			Refrigerate only when fully ripe. Skin will darken.
Berries	2 to 3 days	8 to 12 months	
Canned fruits	2 to 4 days (opened)	2 to 3 months	
Cherries	2 to 3 days	8 to 12 months	
Citrus fruit	2 weeks	4 to 6 months	
Cranberries	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Cranberry cocktail (canned)	5 to 6 days (diluted)	3 to 6 months	
Guavas	1 to 2 days	8 to 12 months	
Juices – canned, bottled or reconstituted			Thaw in the refrigerator. Keep fruit juice tightly covered. Transfer canned juice to a glass or plastic container when opened. Do not store in cans. Keep refrigerated. Do not use after the “used by” date on the carton.
– Pre-mixed, full-strength fruit juice	6 days (diluted)	8 months	
– Real Lemon Juice	12 months		
Kiwis	6 to 8 days	4 to 6 months	
Mangos	Ripen at room temperature	8 to 12 months	
Melons	5 days	8 to 12 months	Wrap uncut cantaloupe and honeydew to prevent odor spreading to other foods.
Nectarines	5 days	8 to 12 months	
Papayas	Ripen at room temperature	8 to 12 months	
Peaches	2 to 3 days	8 to 12 months	
Pears	5 days	8 to 12 months	
Pineapples	5 to 7 days	4 to 6 months	
Plantains	Ripen at room temperature	8 to 12 months	
Plums	5 days	8 to 12 months	
Rhubarb	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Frozen juice			
– Concentrate	Do not refrigerate	2 years	
– Reconstituted	6 days	6 to 12 months	



\* For more information about preparing fresh fruits for freezing, see the “Food Freezing Guide” at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yff/foods/fn1403.pdf](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yff/foods/fn1403.pdf)



# Fresh Vegetables

Frozen vegetables (in box or bag, without sauce): Keep frozen three to six months. Once prepared, store covered in the refrigerator up to two days.

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer* at 0 F	COMMENTS
Artichokes	2 to 3 days		Freezes poorly
Asparagus	2 to 3 days	8 to 12 months	
Beans – green or wax	1 to 2 days	8 to 12 months	
Beets	2 weeks	8 to 12 months	
Broccoli	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	
Brussels sprouts	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	
Cabbage	1 week	8 to 12 months	Keep in the crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag
Canned vegetables	1 to 4 days (opened)	2 to 3 months	
Carrots	2 weeks	8 to 12 months	
Cauliflower	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Celery	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Corn, in husks	1 to 2 days	8 to 12 months	Keep moist
Cucumbers	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Eggplant	2 to 3 days	8 to 12 months	
Frozen vegetables	Do not refrigerate	8 months	
Greens	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	
Kohlrabi	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Lettuce, head			
– unwashed	5 to 7 days		Store in moisture-resistant wrap, bag or lettuce keeper Wrap and store away from other drained vegetables and fruits to prevent russed spotting
– washed, thoroughly	3 to 5 days		
Lima beans	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	
Mushrooms	1 to 2 days	8 to 12 months	Do not wash before storing
Onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes			Refrigeration not needed; see cupboard storage chart
Okra	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	
Parsley	2 to 3 days	3 to 4 months	
Peas			
– shelled	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	Keep in the crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag
– unshelled	3 to 5 days		
Peppers	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Radishes	2 weeks		Freezes poorly
Shredded cabbage, leaf and bibb lettuce, salad greens	1 to 2 days		Keep in moisture-resistant wrap or bag
Squash			
– summer	3 to 4 days	8 to 12 months	Store in a dry place
– winter		8 to 12 months	
Tomatillos	1 week	8 to 12 months	
Tomatoes (ripe)	1 to 2 days	8 to 12 months	Ripen tomatoes at room temperature away from direct sunlight; then refrigerate
Zucchini	3 to 5 days	8 to 12 months	



\* For more information about preparing fresh vegetables for freezing, see the "Food Freezing Guide" at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yjff/foods/fn403.pdf](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yjff/foods/fn403.pdf)



# Fresh Uncooked Meat, Fish, Poultry

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS
<b>Red meats</b>			
– chops	3 to 5 days	3 to 4 months	When meat, poultry or fish is bought in plastic wrapping from self-service counters, store in these packages. Meat packages in self-service counters have been handled by many shoppers. Opening these before storing risks contamination.
– ground meat	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months	
– roasts	3 to 5 days	6 to 12 months	
– steaks	3 to 5 days	6 to 12 months	
– stew meat	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months	
– bratwurst, precooked	5 to 7 days	2 to 3 months	
– bratwurst, fresh	2 to 3 days	2 to 3 months	
– variety meats (liver, heart, etc.)	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months	
<b>Poultry</b>			
– chicken or turkey, whole	1 to 2 days	1 year	
– chicken or turkey, pieces	1 to 2 days	9 months	
– duck or goose, whole	1 to 2 days	6 months	
– giblets	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months	
– ground	1 to 2 days	6 months	

# Fish and Shellfish

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F		Freezer at 0 F		COMMENTS
	(Thawed: Never frozen or previously frozen and home refrigerated)	(Purchased fresh and home frozen)	(Purchased commercially frozen for freezer storage)		
<b>Fish fillets/steaks</b>					
– lean					These storage guidelines indicate optimal shelf life for seafood products held under proper refrigeration or freezing conditions. Temperature fluctuations in home refrigerators will affect optimal shelf life, as will opening and closing refrigerators and freezers often.
• cod, flounder	36 hours	6 to 8 months	10 to 12 months		
• haddock, halibut	36 hours	6 to 8 months	10 to 12 months		
• pollock, ocean perch	36 hours	4 months	8 to 9 months		
• sea trout, rockfish	36 hours	4 months	8 to 9 months		
• Pacific Ocean perch	36 hours	4 months	8 to 9 months		
– fat					
• mullet, smelt	36 hours	N/A	6 to 8 months		
• salmon (cleaned)	36 hours	N/A	7 to 9 months		
– shellfish					
• dungeness crab	5 days	6 months	6 months	Although these storage times ensure a fresh product for maximum refrigeration storage life at 32 F, the consumer should plan on using seafood within 36 hours for optimal quality and freshness of the product.	
• snow crab	5 days	6 months	6 months		
• blue crabmeat (fresh)	5 to 7 days	4 months	N/A		
• blue crabmeat (pasteurized)	6 months	N/A	N/A		
• cocktail claws	5 days	4 months	N/A		
• king crab	7 days	9 months	12 months		
• surimi seafoods	2 weeks	9 months	10 to 12 months		
• shrimp	4 days	5 months	9 months		
• oysters, shucked	4 to 7 days	N/A	N/A		
• clams, shucked	5 days	N/A	N/A		
• lobster, live	1 to 2 days	N/A	N/A		
• lobster, tailmeat	4 to 5 days	6 months	8 months		
– breaded seafoods					
• shrimp	N/A	8 months	12 months	To determine approximate storage time for those species not listed, ask your retailer which category (lean, fat, shellfish, breaded, or smoked) they fall within.	
• scallops	N/A	10 months	16 months		
• fish sticks	N/A	N/A	18 months		
• portions	N/A	N/A	18 months		
– smoked fish					
• herring	3 to 4 days	2 months	N/A		
• salmon, whitefish	5 to 8 days	2 months	N/A		

N/A – not applicable or not advised.

## Wild Game

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F		COMMENTS
	(Thawed: Never frozen or previously frozen and home refrigerated)	(Purchased fresh and home frozen)	(Purchased commercially frozen for freezer storage)	
Venison	3 to 5 days	3 to 4 months	6 to 12 months	
Rabbit, squirrel	1 to 2 days	12 months		
Wild duck, pheasant, goose (whole)	1 to 2 days	6 months		

## Cooked Meat

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS
<b>Meat leftovers</b>			
– cooked meat and meat dishes	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months	Keep covered
– gravy and meat broth	1 to 2 days	2 to 3 months	Keep covered
<b>Cooked poultry, leftovers</b>			
– fried chicken	3 to 4 days	4 months	
– cooked poultry dishes	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months	
– pieces, plain	3 to 4 days	1 month	
– pieces covered with broth, gravy	1 to 2 days	6 months	For quick cooking, cool meat and broth separately. Stir broth to prevent the formation of a top coating of fat, which may seal in heat. Ice cubes can be added to concentrated broth to speed cooling.
– chicken nuggets, patties	1 to 2 days	1 to 3 months	

## Cured and Smoked Meats

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS	
<b>Bacon</b>	7 days	1 month	Keep wrapped. Store in coldest part of refrigerator or in meat keeper. Times are for opened packages. Refer to processor's freshness date on package for storage times of unopened packages.	
<b>Bologna, liverwurst</b>	4 to 6 days			
<b>Dried beef</b>	10 to 12 days			
<b>Hotdogs and lunch meats</b>			In freezer wrap	
– hotdogs, opened package	1 week	1 to 2 months		
– hotdogs, unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months		
– lunch meats, opened	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months		
– lunch meats, unopened	2 weeks	1 to 2 months		
– sausage, raw from pork, beef, turkey	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months		
– smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1 to 2 months		
– hard sausage – pepperoni, jerky sticks	2 to 3 weeks	1 to 2 months		
<b>Ham, corned beef</b>			Drained, wrapped	
– corned beef, in pouch with pickling juices	5 to 7 days	1 month		
– ham, canned (unopened) – label says keep refrigerated	6 to 12 weeks	Don't freeze		Store ham in refrigerator unless label indicates refrigeration is not needed. Once canned ham is opened, use within three to five days.
– ham, fully cooked, whole	7 days	1 to 2 months		
– ham, fully cooked, half	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months		
– ham, fully cooked, slices	3 to 4 days	1 to 2 months		
– liver sausage	4 to 6 days			




\*Freezing not recommended

## Baby Food

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS
<b>Liquids</b>			
– expressed breast milk	24 hours	3 to 6 months	For shelf storage of unopened cans of formula, observe the “use by” dates printed on containers. Store evaporated milk up to 12 months. Heat liquid in hot tap water, not the microwave oven. Shake bottle before testing the temperature on the top of your hand. Discard any unused milk left in a bottle.
– formula	2 days	not recommended	
– whole milk	5 days	3 months	
– reconstituted evaporated milk	3 to 5 days	not recommended	
<b>Solids (opened or freshly made)</b>			
– strained fruits and vegetables	2 to 3 days	6 to 8 months	Observe the “use by” date for shelf storage of unopened jars. Check to see that the safety button in the lid is down. If the jar does not “pop” when opened or is not sealed safely, do not use. Do not heat meats, meat sticks, eggs or jars of food in the microwave. Transfer food from jars to bowls or a heating dish. For 4 ounces of food, microwave on high for 15 seconds; stir and let stand 30 seconds. Stir and test the temperature of the foods before feeding the baby. Don’t feed the baby from the jar.
– strained meats and eggs	1 day	1 to 2 months	
– meat/vegetable combinations	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months	
– homemade baby foods	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months	

## Other Foods

PRODUCTS	Refrigerator at 32 to 40 F	Freezer at 0 F	COMMENTS
<b>Canned goods</b>			
– puddings, custards (opened)	1 to 2 days	*	Transfer food to glass or plastic containers as soon as they are opened. Do not store in the can. Keep covered. Texture will be softer after freezing, but product is acceptable in sauce, soups, stews. Store all canned food tightly covered. Acidic foods should be transferred to glass or plastic containers to avoid metallic taste if stored for more than one or two days.
– gravy and broth	2 days	2 to 3 months	
– meats	2 to 3 days	*	
– sauce, tomato-based	5 days	2 to 3 months	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>			
– soups, stews	2 to 3 days	4 to 6 months	Can be stored in cupboard instead of refrigerator.  Keep frozen until ready to serve. (Best if used in three or four months; may be frozen up to 12 months.)
– sandwiches	2 to 3 days	1 month	
– casseroles	1 to 2 days	1 month	
– leftover cooked food	see other charts	1 month	
– ground spices	6 months	6 to 12 months	
– candies	not necessary	3 to 6 months	
– fats, oils, salad dressings (opened)	several months	*	
– vegetable oil spread		*	
– mayonnaise – commercial	2 months	*	
– TV dinners, frozen casseroles		3 to 4 months	
<b>Deli and vacuum-packed products</b>			
– store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads	3 to 5 days	*	
– pre-stuffed pork and lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed with dressing	1 day	*	
– store-cooked convenience meals	1 to 2 days		
– commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks	*	
– freezer microwave popcorn		12 to 18 months	

\*Freezing not recommended

# Mixes and Packaged Foods

FOOD	STORAGE	HANDLING HINTS
<b>Biscuit, brownie, muffin mix</b>	9 months	Keep cool and dry
<b>Cakes</b>		
– purchased	1 to 2 days	Refrigerate if cakes have buttercream, whipped cream or custard frostings or fillings. Keep cool and dry.
– mixes	9 months	
– angel food	12 months	
<b>Casserole mix</b>		
– complete or add own meat	9 to 12 months	Keep cool and dry; after preparation, store as casserole
<b>Cookies</b>		
– homemade	2 to 3 weeks	Put in airtight container
– packaged	2 months	Keep box tightly closed
<b>Crackers</b>	3 months	Keep box tightly closed
<b>Entrees</b>	18 months	Store in a cool, dry place in the original container. Do not store in a closed container that stops air circulation around the package.
<b>Frosting</b>		
– canned	3 months	Store leftovers in the refrigerator
– mix	8 months	
<b>Hot roll mix</b>	18 months	If opened, put in airtight container
<b>Pancake mixes</b>	6 to 9 months	Keep in airtight package
<b>Pie crust mix</b>	8 months	Keep cool and dry
<b>Pies and pastries</b>	2 to 3 days	Refrigerate whipped cream, custard and chiffon fillings
<b>Potatoes</b>		
– instant mix	6 to 12 months	Keep in airtight package
<b>Powdered drink mixes</b>	18 to 24 months	
<b>Pudding mixes</b>	12 months	Keep cool and dry
<b>Rice mixes</b>	6 months	Keep cool and dry
<b>Sauce and gravy mixes</b>	6 to 12 months	Keep cool and dry
<b>Soup mixes</b>	12 to 15 months	Check package date; keep cool and dry
<b>Toaster pastries</b>	2 to 3 months	Keep in airtight package

## Canned and Dried Foods

FOOD	STORAGE	HANDLING HINTS
<b>Canned food</b> – plastic cans	6 to 12 months	Possibly longer, depending on ingredients
<b>Canned fruit juices</b>	9 months	Keep cool
<b>Juice/drink boxes</b>	9 months	Follow “best used by” date on label
<b>Canned foods</b> – unopened – opened	12 months	Keep cool
• baby foods	2 to 3 days	Close jar tightly and refrigerate. For all opened canned foods, transfer foods in cans to glass or plastic storage containers. Tightly cover and refrigerate. If left in the opened can, off flavors of some foods may develop.
• fish and seafood	2 days	
• fruit	2 to 4 days	
• meats	2 days	
• pickles, olives	1 to 2 months	
• poultry	2 days	
• sauce, tomato	5 days	
• vegetables	1 to 4 days	
<b>Fruits (dried)</b>	6 months	Keep cool in airtight containers; refrigerate if possible
<b>Vegetables</b> – dried – dehydrated flakes	1 year 6 months	Keep cool in airtight container; refrigerate if possible

## Spices, Herbs, Condiments, Extracts

FOOD	STORAGE	HANDLING HINTS
<b>Catsup, chili sauce</b> – unopened – opened	12 months 1 month	Refrigerate for longer storage
<b>Mustard, prepared yellow</b> – unopened – opened	2 years 6 to 8 months	May be refrigerated; stir before using
<b>Spices and herbs</b> – whole – ground – herb/spice blends – herbs	1 to 2 years 6 months 6 months 6 months	Store in airtight containers in dry places away from sunlight and heat. At times listed, check aroma; if faded, replace. Whole cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon sticks maintain quality the beyond two-year period; can be stored in the freezer to extend shelf life.
<b>Vanilla</b> – unopened – opened	2 years 12 months	Keep tightly closed; volatile oils escape
<b>Other extracts</b> – opened	12 months	Keep tightly closed; volatile oils escape
<b>Soy sauce (unopened)</b>	3 years	Use within six to nine months after opening
<b>Tabasco, worchestershire</b>	1 year	Refrigerate after opening

## Miscellaneous Foods

FOOD	STORAGE	HANDLINGS HINTS
<b>Cheese, parmesan</b> (grated)		
– unopened	10 months	
– opened	2 months	Refrigerate after opening; keep tightly closed
<b>Coconut</b>		
– shredded, canned or packaged		
• unopened	12 months	
• opened	6 months	Refrigerate after opening
<b>Meat substitutes</b>		
– textured protein products (imitation bacon bits, etc.)	4 months	Keep tightly covered; for longer storage, refrigerate
<b>Metered caloric products, powdered breakfast mixes, liquid breakfast formulas</b>	6 months	Keep in can, closed jar or original packets
<b>Nuts</b>		
– in shell, unopened	4 months	
– nutmeats, packaged		Refrigerate after opening; freeze for longer storage
• vacuum can, unopened	3 months	Unsalted and blanched nuts keep longer than salted
• other packaging, unopened	3 months	
• package or can, opened	2 weeks	
<b>Peanut butter</b>		
– unopened	6 to 9 months	Refrigeration not needed; keeps longer if refrigerated
– opened	2 to 3 months	Natural peanut butter must be refrigerated after opening
<b>Peas, beans</b> (dried)	12 months	Store in airtight container
<b>Popcorn</b>	2 years	Store in airtight container
<b>Microwave popcorn</b>	12 months	
<b>Vegetables, fresh</b>		
– onions	1 week	Keep dry and away from sun
– potatoes		
• white	2 to 4 weeks	For longer storage, keep below 50 F
• sweet	1 to 2 weeks	Don't refrigerate sweet potatoes
<b>Soft drinks</b>	6 months	
<b>Whipped topping</b> (dry)	12 months	Keep cool and dry
<b>Yeast</b> (dry)	Expiration date on package	Can be frozen to extend shelf life



## What Do Packaging Dates Mean?

- “Sell by” means the store should sell the product by the printed date, but the consumer still can eat the product safely after that date.
- “Best if used by” means the consumer should use the product by the date listed for best quality and flavor (not for safety reasons).
- “Use by” is the last date recommended for use at peak quality. You likely will see a marked deterioration in product quality (flavor, appearance, texture) after that date.
  - Note: Do not use infant formula and baby food after the “use-by” date.
- “Closed or coded dates” are packing numbers used by the manufacturer. If a problem occurs with the food, it can be recalled.

**For more information about nutrition, food safety and health,  
see [www.ag.ndsu.edu/food](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/food)**

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