

The Dating Game

What Do the Dates On Food Products Mean, Anyway?



Test your knowledge! Match the date with the description.

- a. Use-by date
 - b. Sell-by date
 - c. Closed or coded date
1. ___ Stores should pull items from the shelves if they are not sold by this date. The products are still good for a while if stored properly at home.
 2. ___ According to the manufacturer, food will be of high quality until this date. Although the foods are safe to consume after the date, these items may have lower quality.
 3. ___ These are packing dates for use by the manufacturer, and they often are a series of letters and/or numbers.

Dates on food packages can be confusing. Food product dating is not required on foods except for infant formula and some baby food. Almost all food dates are “quality” dates, not safety dates. Food may have color, flavor, texture or nutritional changes during long storage.



Answers: 1. b; 2. a; 3. c

Take Steps at Home to Keep Food at Top Quality

- **Check the dates at the store.** Purchase the product before the sell-by date.
- **Take perishable foods home immediately after purchase and refrigerate promptly.** Be sure your refrigerator maintains food at or below 40 F.
- **Write the date of purchase on the foods and arrange your cupboards “first in, first out.”** In other words, place the “oldest” foods in the front so you use them first.
- **Examine food containers.** Discard rusty cans of food or cans with sharp dents in the seams. Discard swollen cans of food in a place where no humans or animals will consume the contents. Wear plastic gloves, double-bag the containers and place with nonrecyclable trash items.
- **Use meat by the “use by” date or freeze.** As long as the meat remains frozen, it is safe, but it may lose quality with long storage. Keep frozen foods at 0 F or below.

For more information, visit www.ndsu.edu/eatsmart.

This program is funded in part by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more contact your county Social Services office or call 1-800-755-2716.

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Check your cupboards to see if you have some canned fruit to use in this easy fruit salad or dessert.

Fruit Salad

- 1 (3.4-ounce) package instant vanilla pudding
- 1 c. buttermilk (or milk)
- 1 (16-ounce) container light (low-fat) whipped topping
- 2 (7-ounce) cans mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 (15-ounce) can pineapple, drained
- 1 (15-ounce) can fruit cocktail, drained

Menu Idea:

Grilled hamburgers with sliced tomatoes and lettuce

Carrot sticks

Fruit Salad

Low-fat or fat-free milk

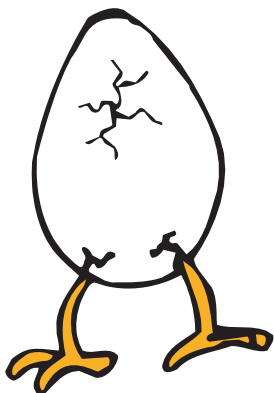
Mix pudding and buttermilk until well-blended. Mix in whipped topping. Toss in well-drained fruit and chill. Makes 12 servings.

Per serving: 163 calories, 27 grams (g) of carbohydrate, 4 g of fat, 1 g of fiber and 34 milligrams of sodium.

Note: You can substitute fresh, seasonal fruit for canned, if you prefer.

Best Fresh
Produce Buys
for May

Asparagus
Pineapple
Strawberries
Tomatoes



Just for Fun
What happens when you tell an egg a joke?
It cracks up!

I just noticed that a carton of eggs in my refrigerator has a “sell-by” date that passed a week ago. How long can I use them?

Eggs have a fairly long shelf life in your refrigerator. You can store them in your refrigerator and use them for three to five weeks after the sell-by date. To keep them cold, keep the eggs in the carton and store them in the main area of your refrigerator, not the door.

I usually bring my lunch to work. I see some people heating food in plastic margarine containers and Styrofoam boxes. Is that safe?

No, you should not microwave foods in Styrofoam or margarine containers. The materials may melt, and unsafe chemicals may get in your food.

To safely heat food in a microwave oven, use containers made of glass or microwavable plastic. The trays that come with microwaveable dinners are meant for one-time use only; do not save these containers and re-use them. If you are covering food containers with plastic wrap, be sure the plastic wrap does not come into contact with the food.

Even better, read the section in the microwave’s owners manual about the best containers to use. Usually the manual also provides information about how to test whether containers are microwave-safe.

When cooking prepackaged microwaveable meals, be sure to follow the directions. While you heat foods, be sure to rotate and stir your food midway during heating.

By the way, bringing your lunch to work is an excellent cost-saving idea!



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Please call for more information on nutrition, food purchasing or food safety.



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