



# Food Storage Guidelines

Revised November 2019

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The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank monitors all food received. This guide explains proper food storage guidelines. If you have any questions regarding the information provided, please reach out to Agency Services staff at:

Harrisburg: (717) 564-1700

OR

Williamsport: (570) 321-8023





*\*All food that has been rescued must include a label with a disclaimer that reads: "Warning! This container holds rescued food. This food may contain, have come in contact with or have been produced in a facility which also processes milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, wheat, soy and/ or sesame seeds."*

## WHY IS PROPER FOOD STORAGE IMPORTANT?

Proper food storage enables us to provide safe food for our clients, while also minimizing food waste by allowing products to survive on the shelf longer. By adhering to safe temperature storage guidelines, understanding the meaning of dates on products, storing the items in the correct location and recognizing when a food has gone bad, we can provide the best products possible to our clients.

### What Do the Dates on Packages/Canned Foods Mean?

Below are some common code dates you may see on food packaging.

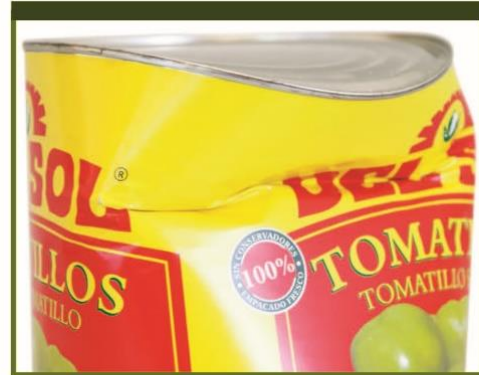
<p><b>"Expiration Date"</b> (Example: "Expires 2/16/19" or "Do not use after 5/7/19")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You can find this label on baby food, infant formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, and baking powder.</li><li>According to the federal law, the only foods required to have an expiration date are baby food, infant formula and medication. </li><li>It means do not distribute or consume after the listed date (yeast and baking powder are safe to consume; however, they tend not to work as well after expiration date).</li></ul>	<p><b>"Pack Date"</b> (Example: "Packed on 9/23/05" or "192 VIG 2109")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You can find this label on canned food, crackers, cookies and spices.</li><li>This represents the date the food was packaged. A code can be used that is not easily understood by the general public. However, the food is generally of good quality and can be safely eaten long past the listed date. </li></ul>
<p><b>"Sell By" Date or Pull Date</b> (Example: "Sell by May 16, 2019")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Located on refrigerated foods like milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, packaged salads and lunch meat. </li><li>This date means that the store must sell them before the date listed on the package. When the foods are closer to date, these foods are often donated.</li><li>The Food Bank staff monitors the food to make sure that the quality is acceptable and that it has been handled properly to ensure safety.</li></ul>	<p><b>"Use By" Date or Quality Date</b> (Example: "Best by 3/5/19" or "Use Before 10/11/19")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Look for this label on crackers, cookies, cold cereals, and other dry, shelf stable foods.</li><li>This date represents the manufacturer's recommendation for how long the food will be at its best quality. After the date has passed, the food is still safe to consume, but may slowly decrease quality and nutrients. </li></ul>

Post-dated products are safe to eat! According to the USDA, FDA, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Food Marketing Institute and the Grocery Manufacturers Association, dates listed on products are **quality dates** not **safety dates**. They remain safe because of the rigorous processing and storage controls.

# Discard Cans With These Defects



Severe dent in seam



Deep dents in can body



Missing or unreadable labels



Swollen or bulging ends



Holes or signs of leaking



Rust that cannot be wiped off



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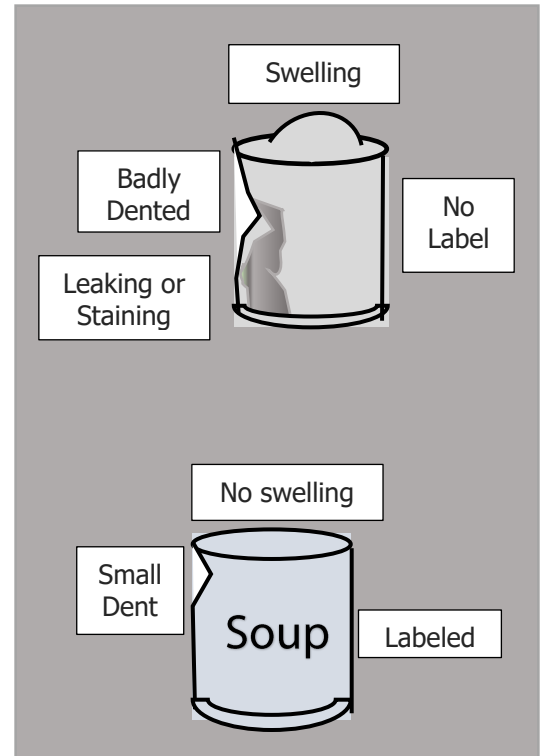
## WHAT IS A SHELF STABLE PRODUCT?

- Products that are “dry” foods that do not require refrigeration.
- Examples are jarred, canned, boxed foods.
- These can remain edible for up to years past their date depending on the food.

### Should I use this canned or jarred product?

No	Yes
Unlabeled	Proper Labels are on container
Badly Rusted	Rust that can be wiped off
“Swollen”	No swelling visible
Foul Odor	Free from odor
Badly dented	Small dents
Leaking or stained	Free from leaks or stains
Seal is broken	Seal is intact

*Tip: A bad dent is anything that you can lay your finger into.*



### Should I use this boxed product?

No	Yes
Unlabeled	Proper labels are on container
Packaging is wet	Packaging is dry
Outside packaging is torn with no inside packaging	If singularly packaged, outside packaging intact. If double packaged, inside packing intact with outside packaging damaged
Inside packaging is torn at all (if applicable)	Inside packaging intact
Moldy product	Free from mold and bad odor

### Tips for Shelf Stable Product Storage

- Storage area for **shelf stable products** should be in a clean, dry and cool area ranging from **50-70 degrees F**.
- Everything must be stored **6 inches off the floor** on a shelf or pallet and away from walls.
- If shelves are wood and are not metal or wired, they must be painted or covered with contact paper to prevent transfer of bacteria to other products.
- Practice FIFO, meaning first in, first out. This will use up the older products before using the new ones.
- FEFO, first expired, first out, further prevents food waste by using expired products before the new ones.

### Food Safety Concerns for Shelf Stable Products

- Any hole in the packaging or cans can allow bacteria to get into the product and contaminate the food.
- Rust can create tiny holes in cans which allow the bacteria to pass through.
- *Clostridium botulinum* are bacteria that can live in canned foods. The biggest sign of a possible existence of this in food is the *swelling* of the can.
- Boxes that are wet can easily have holes in them (bacteria are more likely to be in places with moisture).

## SHELF STABLE USAGE GUIDELINES

Grains		
Shelf Stable Product	Shelf Life After Code Date	Handling Hints
Bread	7 days	
Baking Mixes	1 year	Keep dry and covered.
Cakes (prepared)	4 days	If cake contains buttercream, whipped cream or custard, it needs to be refrigerated.
Cereal	1 year (ready to eat), 6 months (cook before eating)	
Cookies	2 months	Store in original packaging or airtight container.
Flour	1 year (cake or all purpose), 6 months (whole wheat)	Store in original packaging or airtight container.
Macaroni and Cheese	2 years	
Pancake Mix	9 months	
Potatoes (instant)	1 year	Keep cool and dry.
Pasta (dry without eggs)	2 years	Store in original packaging or airtight container.
Rice	2 years (white), 1 year (brown)	Keep tightly sealed.
Rice or pasta meals	18 months	Keep cool and dry.
Sugar	2 years (white), 18 months (brown)	Store in original packaging or airtight container.
Condiments		
Shelf Stable Product	Shelf Life after Code Date	Handling Hints
Barbeque Sauce	1 year	
Gravy (dry mixes)	2 years	Keep cool and dry
James, jellies	1 year	Refrigerate after opening
Ketchup, chili sauces, cocktail sauce	1 year	
Mayonnaise	3 months	Refrigerate after opening
Mustard	2 years	
Olives	1 year	
Pancake Syrup	1 year	Keep tightly closed
Salad Dressing	1 year	Refrigerate after opening
Salsa	1 year	
Worcestershire sauce	1 year	

## SHELF STABLE USAGE GUIDELINES

Canned Products		
Shelf Stable Product	Shelf Life after Code Date	Handling Hints
Beans	5 years	
Gravies, pastas, stews, cream sauces	5 years	
Soup and soup broths (non-tomato based)	5 years	
Applesauce and Juices	18 months	
Vinegar	18 months	Keep tightly closed. Slightly cloudy appearance does not mean it is poor quality.
Pickles, sauerkraut, baked beans	18 months	
Tomatoes, tomato soup, tomato based sauces	18 months	
Meat	3 years	
Fish	3 years	
Pie Filling	3 years	
Miscellaneous		
Shelf Stable Products	Shelf Life after Code Date	Handling Hints
Beans, dried	1 year	Keep in original packaging/airtight container
Bouillon	6 months	Keep dry and covered
Candy	2 years	Keep cool
Crackers, pretzels, chips	6 months	Keep in original packaging/airtight container
Nuts	4 months (shelled), 6 months (unshelled)	Refrigerate after opening
Oil	6 months	
Vegetable shortening	3 months	
Peanut Butter	9 months	Can keep longer if refrigerated but use at room temperature
Shelf stable pudding or Jell-O	2 months	Keep in original container



## COLD STORAGE

- Some items need to be stored in cold storage in order to slow the rapid growth of bacteria.
- The two types of cold storage include refrigerators and freezers
  - **Refrigerated** foods should be held at **less than 41 degrees F**
  - **Frozen foods** should be kept below **0 degrees F**
- Items such as dairy, seafood, meats, and some produce should be kept in cold storage. Some of these items can be frozen to further extend their shelf life.
- Read-to-eat foods need to be stored above meats to prevent contamination.

### Where to Store Refrigerated Food

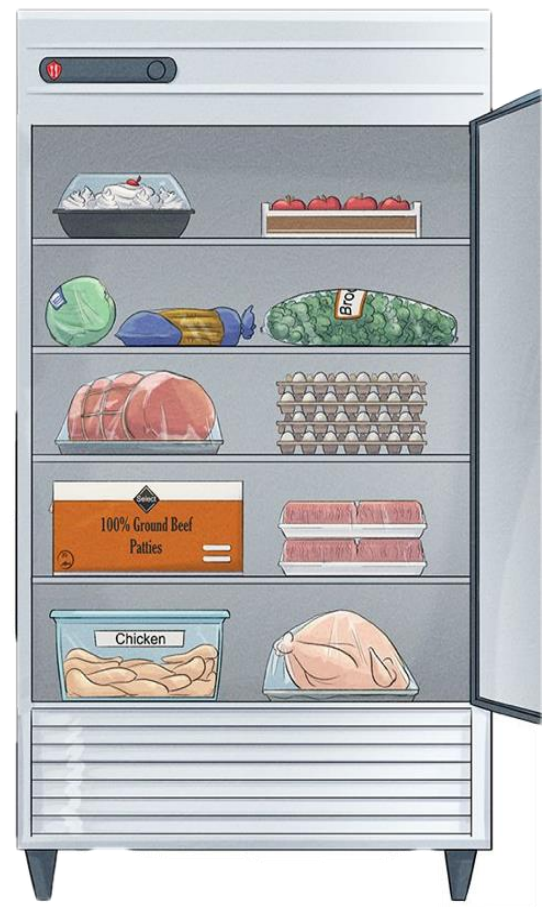
Ready to eat foods on top (cakes, prepared salads, cooked meats)

Unwashed produce should go next

Dairy, eggs, seafood, whole cuts of meat (steaks, pork chops, etc) go below that

Ground beef or ground seafood should follow

Uncooked poultry of any kind should be placed on lowest shelf



### Tips for Refrigerated and Frozen Foods

- Leave all meat in its original packaging before distribution of food
- Store eggs in their original carton before distribution
- Refrigerated foods should be kept below 41 degrees
- Keep frozen foods below 0 degrees
- Do not thaw and re-freeze meat or seafood



## COLD STORAGE USAGE GUIDELINES

Dairy		
Product	When to throw out after sell-by date (Refrigerator)	When to throw out after sell-by date (Freezer)
Butter	3 months	9 months
Cheese: hard	6 months	6 months
Cheese soft	1 week	Do not freeze
Cottage cheese	2 weeks	Do not freeze
Cream cheese	2 weeks	Do not freeze
Cream (half and half)	3-4 days	4 months
Cream (heavy)	10 days	Do not freeze
Dips made with sour cream	2 weeks	Do not freeze
Eggs	5 weeks	Do not freeze
Ice cream	N/A	6 months
Margarine	6 months	12 months
Milk	1 week	1 month
Pudding	1 month	Do not freeze
Yogurt	2 weeks	2 months
Whipped cream (aerosol can or real)	4 weeks	Do not freeze
Whipped topping (non-dairy)	3 months	Do not freeze
Fish/Seafood		
Product	When to throw out after sell-by date (Refrigerator)	When to throw out after sell-by date (Freezer)
Cod, flounder, sole, haddock, Pollock	2 days	8 months
Salmon, mackerel, perch	2 days	3 months
Shrimp and other shellfish	2 days	12 months
Deli		
Product	When to throw out after sell-by date (Refrigerator)	When to throw out after sell-by date (Freezer)
Main dishes or meals	4 days	3 months
Meats in gravy	2 days	6 months
Salads (macaroni, egg, etc.)	4 days	Do not freeze
Spinach or salad (bagged)	Expiration date	Do not freeze
Side dishes	4 days	2 months
Fruit	Sell by date	Do not freeze

## COLD STORAGE USAGE GUIDELINES

Meats		
Product	When to throw out after sell-by date (Refrigerator)	When to throw out after sell-by date (Freezer)
Beef, lamb, pork	5 days	1 year
Chicken and turkey	2 days	9 months
Ground meat	2 days	6 months
Hot dogs	2 weeks	6 months
Luncheon meats	2 weeks	6 months
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Sausage raw	2 days	2 months
Sausage (smoked link/patty)	1 week	2 months
Pepperoni	3 weeks	2 months
Chicken nuggets/patties	2 days	3 months
Fried Chicken	4 days	4 months
Miscellaneous		
Product	When to throw out after sell-by date (Refrigerator)	When to throw out after sell-by date (Freezer)
Tube cans of biscuits, rolls, pizza dough	Sell by date	Do not freeze
Cartons of juice, lemonade	10 days	Do not freeze
Frozen vegetables	N/A	8 months
Ready-to-bake pie or pizza crust	Sell by date	2 months
Frozen fruit	N/A	4 months
Cookie dough	Sell by date	2 months
Frozen TV dinners	N/A	6 months
Tofu	Sell by date	Do not freeze
Soy meat substitutes	Sell by date	18 months
Juice Concentrate	10 days	1 year

# Storing Food Safely



Store refrigerated food at 41°F (5°C) or lower



Keep frozen food frozen solid



Store food away from walls and at least six inches (15cm) off the floor



Store ready-to-eat food above raw meat, seafood, and poultry



Store food only in containers made for food



Store food only in designated storage areas



# HOW TO STORE FRESH PRODUCE

**Agencies that distribute fresh produce must advise clients to wash produce before use.**

- All produce should be thoroughly washed under running water before cutting, cooking or eating.
- Any damaged portions should be cut away and discarded.
- To further reduce bacterial presence, dry produce with a clean cloth or paper towel before consuming.

## In The Refrigerator



## Ripen on the Counter First, Then Refrigerate

(following refrigeration, use within 1-3 days)  
Pears, Nectarines, Peaches, Kiwi, Plums, Avocados

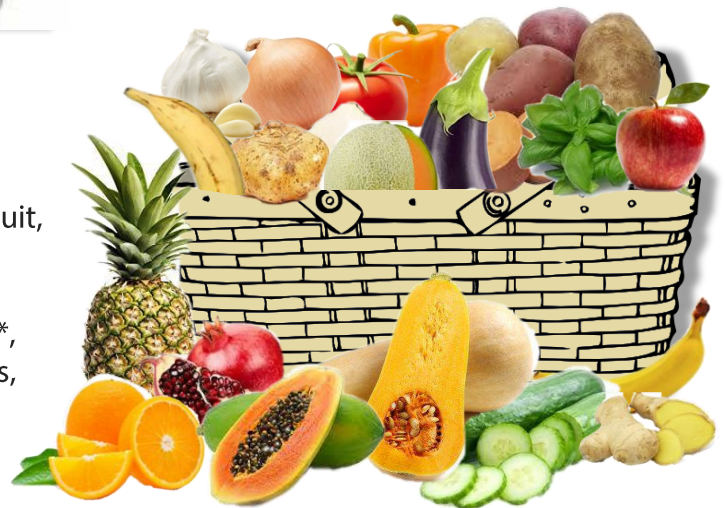


## Store Only at Room Temperature

**Fruit:** apples (fewer than 7 days), bananas, citrus fruit, mangoes, melons, papayas, pineapple, plantain, pomegranates

**Vegetables:** basil (in water), cucumber\*, Eggplant\*, Garlic\*\*, Ginger, Jicama, Onions, peppers\*, Potatoes,

*\*Cucumbers, eggplant, and peppers can be refrigerated for 1-3 days if they are used soon after removing from the refrigerator*





## HOW TO TELL IF YOUR PRODUCE HAS GONE BAD

Fruit and vegetables are often unnecessarily thrown away when they appear bruised or have discoloration on them. Produce is generally safe to consume when a bit overripe or squishy. However, if your product is moldy, smelly, contains holes, or is leaking then you should discard it. Below are some examples and pictures to help you identify ripe, overripe, and inedible produce.

### Bananas



Bananas tend to brown fast when in colder temperatures or when left in the refrigerator. However, the banana is still in good condition underneath the skin! Be sure to feel the banana and check for squishiness or if it has a bad smell, before you toss it!

### Berries



Berries tend to ripen quickly. If there is a small bit of mold on one or two of the berries, it is safe to remove the moldy ones and eat the remaining berries after washing them thoroughly. However, if the mold is covering all surrounding berries, discard and do not eat. If berries are squishy, they are generally safe to eat, however, their quality and taste may not be at their peak.

### Peppers



The pepper on the left is ripe and ready to eat! The pepper on the right is showing signs of molding and should be thrown away!

*Tip: Just because one piece of fruit/vegetable has mold on it (such as an orange or grape) does not mean you need to throw away the entire bag/box! Be sure to discard the moldy item and wash the surrounding products well*

# Loading and Transporting Food Safely

**Keep food at safe temperatures in unrefrigerated vehicles.**



Cover cold food with thermal blankets or use coolers with ice packs



Keep drive times to 30 minutes or less



Check food temperatures after arriving at the destination

**Prevent contamination:**



**DON'T** store raw food over ready-to-eat food



**DON'T** store allergens over other products



**DON'T** store chemicals with food products



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## IMPORTANT STORAGE TIPS TO SHARE WITH YOUR CLIENTS

- Dates listed on products are **quality dates** not **safety dates**  
*(unless it contains the words “Expires” or “Do Not Use After...”)*
- Products are generally safe to consume after the listed date, as long as they are stored and handled properly.
- Always observe your shelf stable product for signs of damage or contamination  
*(Don’t discard unless signs of leakage, deep dents, swelling, missing labels or contamination are present.)*
- Make sure **cold items** are stored at or **below 41 degrees F**. Make sure that ready to eat food is stored above raw meat, seafood and poultry in the refrigerator.
- Certain fruit and vegetables should be stored in the refrigerator, while others should be stored at room temperature.
- Just because a fruit is discolored (such as a banana) or has mold on one portion (such as one berry or orange in a box) does not mean you should throw it away instantly. *(observe the surrounding fruit, feel the fruit to see if it feels squishy, and check the smell to see if it smells rotten)*
- If you have further questions about a food’s storing capability, call the number listed on the product packaging if available.

### Additional Resources and Recommended Sites

- USDA Food Keeper app for Apple and Android: [www.FoodSafety.gov/keep/foodkeeperapp](http://www.FoodSafety.gov/keep/foodkeeperapp)
- Still Tasty – Ultimate Shelf Life Guide: [www.Stilltasty.com](http://www.Stilltasty.com)



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