



SHELF LIFE REFERENCE GUIDE

This quick reference guide is intended to provide estimated shelf life for products typically available through the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. The guidelines stated for refrigerated and frozen products assume temperature control at <40°F and <0°F respectively. Dry products are expected to be held under dry conditions, protected from temperature extremes of cold and heat. Product dating is for sellability, not consumability except for baby food and formula.

PRODUCT	ESTIMATED SHELF LIFE PAST CODE	DISCARD IF...
Baby Formula, Baby Food	Do not use beyond code	Leaking Past Code
Bread/Bakery Products	3-10 Days	Any Visible Package Defect Mold
Canned Goods (High Acid): <i>juices (tomato, orange, lemon, lime, and grapefruit); tomatoes, fruit products, pickles, sauerkraut, and foods treated with vinegar-based sauces or dressings</i>	12 - 18 Months	Bulging Leaking Severe Seam Dents Missing Label Severe Rust
Canned Goods (Low Acid): <i>canned meat and poultry, stews, soups (except tomato), potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, beans, beets, peas, and pumpkin</i>	2 - 5 Years	Bulging Leaking Severe Seam Dents Missing Label Severe Rust
Cereal	6 - 12 Months	Any Visible Package Defect
Crackers	6 - 12 Months	Any Visible Package Defect
Dried Beans	1 - 2 Years	Any Visible Package Defect Mold
Freezer Products	3 Months – 1 Year <i>(Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely. Recommended date is for quality only.)</i>	Any Visible Package Defects Freezer Burn Off Odor Evidence of Thaw/Refreezing
Fully Cooked Meat <i>(lunch meat, hot dogs, bacon)</i>	1 - 2 Weeks	Off Odor Any Visible Package Defect Mold
Jars/Bottles	6 Months - 1 Year	Popped Safety Seal Filth Under Rim of Lid Missing Label Dented Lid
Meat and Fish <i>(Fresh, Not Frozen)</i>	1 - 3 Days	Bulging Package Off Odor Any Visible Package Defect
Milk	7 Days	Broken Seal Discoloration Off Odor
Prepared Salads/Dips	3 - 4 Days	Off Odor Mold
Raw Eggs	3 - 5 Weeks	Off Odor Off Color
Rice/Dried Pasta	1 - 2 Years	Any Viable Package Defect Mold
Refrigerated Juices/Teas	1 - 4 Weeks	Any Visible Package Defect Mold Off Odor/Taste
Yogurt	1 - 3 Weeks	Any Visible Package Defect Mold Off Odor/Taste



IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR FOOD

DENTS

All cans that go through the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan are inspected for damage. You have the opportunity to inspect the cans you receive as well. Look for these problems:

- Severe dents on the side seam
- Sharp dents that are parallel to the rim of the can
- Sharp dents in the side of the can that prevent it from being stacked
- Buckled or pinched tops and/or bottoms
- Leaks from side seam, rim seam, or punctures
- Bulges or puffed tops and/or bottoms
- Ends that give or flip and bulge when pushed with a finger
- Severe crease dents on the rim or on a side seam

Minor dents to the sides or tops of cans do not harm the food inside the can. Stores donate these products because they are not pleasing to the eye of the shopper who will pay top dollar only for a perfect product.



DATES

Sell-By Date - Tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.

Best If Used By (or Before) Date - Indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

Use-By Date - The last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula.

Freeze-By Date - Indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.



STORAGE

Low-Acid Canned Goods

2-5 years

(canned meats, stews, soups except tomato, pasta products, corn, potatoes, beans, peas, beets)

High-Acid Canned Goods

12-18 months

(tomato products, fruits, sauerkraut, and foods in vinegar-based sauces or dressings)

