

## Shelf-Life Dating : Know Where You Stand

The 20th century ushered in packaged foods, with the use of preservatives and innovative packaging to lengthen their shelf life. Most packaged items have a date imprinted on the container, but these may be difficult to find, read and interpret. These simple guides for common foods may help you know what to keep and what to toss.

By Rebecca Morley, MA

**MILK**— Usually carries a **sell by** date. Milk is vulnerable to its environment, losing some of the vitamin potency when exposed to light. That's why milk comes in opaque plastic or paperboard containers. Light can cause unpleasant flavor changes in as little as 36 hours. Even though it is not harmful, who would want to drink it? If stored at 37 degrees Fahrenheit, pasteurized milk remains fresh for **2-5 days beyond the sell by date**.



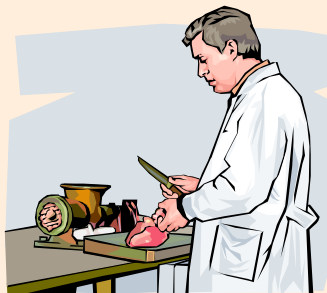
**EGGS**— *Salmonella* is a chief concern most people have about eggs. **But surprisingly, eggs have a long shelf life.** USDA research found that even after 30 days on the grocery shelf, eggs will keep 4-5 weeks beyond the **sell by** date if properly stored and handled.



**MEAT**— Whether it's hamburger or a pork chop, either eat it or freeze it within **2 days of purchase**. Even if the **sell by** date is 5 days away, the home refrigerator isn't cold enough to keep meat fresh for more than 2 days. Frozen meats don't keep their freshness forever either. From ground beef at 3 months to lamb or venison at 12 months, there is quite a difference! Go to [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) for details.

**CANNED FOODS**— Manufacturers claim that canned foods don't expire for at least 2 years. But guidelines from the University of Minnesota say to store below 75 degrees Fahrenheit and **not to keep more than 12 months**. Though food will not necessarily spoil after a year, the vitamins begin to deteriorate. If canned items are past the expiration dates posted on them, are rusty or bulging, discard them.

**POULTRY**— Chicken should be cooked or frozen within **2 days of purchase**. It will keep about **12 months in the freezer**. A common and dangerous mistake is to thaw poultry on the kitchen counter or in the sink. Bacteria multiply rapidly at room temperature. Chicken is particularly at risk for microbes. A safe way to defrost poultry is in the refrigerator, transferring promptly from the freezer.



**BOXED CAKE MIXES, CEREALS, PASTAS, ETC.** - kept in cool dry storage, cake mixes, pasta, cereal and cookies will last unopened up to **six months after the date of purchase**. However, once opened, even when dry, the freshness will dissipate in about 2 months.



I've called today's meeting to discuss the **"shelf-life"** of out-dated staff.

