



SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

Food Bank of Alaska often distributes food items after the date on the package. This food is still safe to eat! Food manufacturers use different date codes to ensure consumers receive their product at peak quality. Once a product is past code date, many manufacturers donate it to food banks. Food Bank staff and volunteers monitor this food to ensure the quality remains good.

This document provides a reference for the “shelf life” of products, or how long these foods are good PAST CODE DATE.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

- The first section reviews how manufacturers use dates to code food for purchase.
- Charts then offer guidance on how long different foods can be safely consumed past the date stamped on the packaging.
- The foods listed are organized according to the following categories:
 - Shelf-Stable Foods: Anything that can be stored at room temperature before opening. This includes baby foods, condiments, canned goods and dry goods.
 - Shelf-Stable Beverages: Juices, soda, water, and other drinks designed to be stored at room temperature until opening. Not to be confused with beverages that must be kept refrigerated.

This guide offers a fairly thorough list of foods that may be distributed by Food Bank of Alaska. It is not exhaustive and some items you receive may not be included. For those not included, please use the average shelf life of the first two ingredients to determine if that product is still ok to shelve.



SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

WHAT DO CODE DATES MEAN?

The only foods required by federal law to have expiration dates are baby food, infant formula and over-the-counter medications. No medicines should be distributed after the expiration date. The Food Bank does not distribute most baby food past its expiration date. However, some products designed for babies such as juice and cookies or biscuits can be distributed past their date are safe to eat.

Many canned and boxed products are safe to eat long after the date on the container, and the shelf life of refrigerated and frozen foods can be extended if they are handled properly. Once a perishable item is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires. Foods kept frozen continuously are safe indefinitely, though the quality slowly deteriorates over time. Here are some code dates you may see on food packages:

"Expiration Date" (Examples: "Expires 11/15/16" or "Do not use after 11/15/16")

- **Look for it on:** Baby food and formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder.
- **What it means:** Do not distribute infant formula, baby food, vitamins or medications after expiration date. Yeast and baking powder work less well after expiration but are safe to eat.

"Pack Date" (Examples: "Packed on 03/01/2012" or "22:5306412" or "KL064")

- **Look for it on:** Canned food, crackers, cookies, spices.
- **What it means:** This is the date food was packaged. A code is often used that cannot be understood by the general public, often numbering days sequentially so that January 1 is day 001 and December 31 is day 365. Usually this food is of good quality and safe to eat for a long time past the date. Use the Code Breaker manual as needed.

"Use By" Date (Example: "Use by January 1, 2012" or "Use before 1/1/2012")

- **Look for it on:** Crackers, cookies, cold cereals and other dry/shelf stable food.
- **What it means:** This date is the manufacturer's recommendation for how long food will be at peak quality. After the quality date, the food is still safe to eat but slowly begins to lose nutrients and the quality begins to lessen.

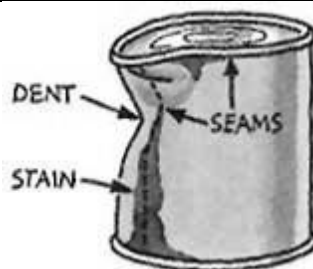
SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

SHELF-STABLE PRODUCTS

Most shelf-stable or 'dry' foods (cans, boxes, bags) remain edible for several days, months or even years past their code date. Always examine the packaging to make sure it has not been damaged to the point the food is no longer safe to eat.

Discard Cans or Jars If:

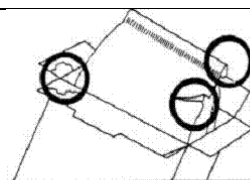
- Leaking or stained
- Swollen
- Rusty
- Badly dented, crimped or pinched
- Container is cracked
- Foul odor
- Safety seals are broken or missing
- Lids are loose or missing
- Foods exhibit changed color or odor



Discard Boxed Food If:

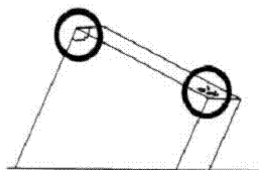
Inside bag:

- Is torn or leaking
- Has moldy or foreign objects inside
- Seals are ripped



Box without an inside bag:

- Is open or torn
- Has live or dead insects, webs or droppings
- Is stained or wet





SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

EXPIRATION DATE AND SHELF LIFE CHART

Shelf-Stable Foods	Shelf Life After Code Date
Baby Food	
Cereal: dry mixes	Expiration date on package
Food in jars, cans	Expiration date on package
Formula	Expiration date on package
Juice	1 year
Canned Foods	
Beans	3 years
Fish: salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel	3 years
Frosting, canned	10 months
High-acid foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit (including applesauce, juices) • Pickles, sauerkraut • Baked beans with mustard/vinegar • Tomatoes, tomato-based soups & sauces 	1-2 years
Low-acid foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravy, soups/broths not tomato-based • Pasta, stews, cream sauces • Vegetables (not tomatoes) 	2-5 years
Meat: beef, chicken, pork, turkey	2-3 years
Pie filling	3 years
Aseptically-packaged Products	
UHT Milk	1 year
Broth: beef, chicken, or vegetable	3 years
Soup	3 years
Fruits	3 years
Vegetables	3 years
Condiments, Sauces, Syrups	
Barbecue sauce (bottled)	1 year
Chutney	12 months
Frosting, canned	10 months
Gravy (dry mix envelopes)	2 years
Honey	2 years – safe after crystallization
Horseradish, in jar	12 months



SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

James, jellies, preserves	18 months
Shelf-Stable Foods cont.	Shelf Life After Code Date
Condiments, Sauces, Syrups cont.	
Ketchup, cocktail, or chili sauce: jar, bottle, or packet	18 months
Mayonnaise: jar, bottle, or packet	3-6 months
Molasses	2 years
Mustard: jar, bottle, or packet	2 years
Olives	18-24 months
Pickles	1 year, canned 2 years, jarred
Salad dressings: bottled	1 year
Salsa: bottled	12-18 months
Spaghetti sauce, canned	18 months
Spaghetti sauce, jarred	18 months
Syrup, chocolate	2 years
Syrup, corn	2 years
Syrup, pancake	2 years
Vinegar	2 years
Worcestershire sauce	2 years
Dry Goods	
Bacon Bits, Imitation	4 months
Baking mix, pancake	9 months
Baking mixes (brownie, cake, muffin, etc.)	12-18 months
Baking powder	18 months
Baking soda	Indefinite if kept dry
Beans, dried	1 year
Biscuit mix	15 months
Bouillon: beef or chicken	12-24 months
Bread, commercially prepared	3-5 days at room temp 3 months stored frozen
Cakes, commercially prepared	2-4 days at room temp Several months frozen
Candy (all, including chocolate)	9 months, caramel 18 months, chocolate 36 months, hard candy
Casserole Mix	9-12 months



SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

Cereal, cold	1 year
Cereal, hot	1 year
Cookies	4 months
Shelf-Stable Foods cont.	Shelf Life After Code Date
Dry Goods cont.	
Cornmeal	1 year at room temp
Cornstarch	18 months
Crackers	8 months Except graham crackers, 2 months
Diet powder mixes	6 months
Flour, white (all purpose or cake)	1 year
Flour, whole wheat	6 months
Fruit, dried	6 months
Garlic, chopped, commercial jars	18 months
Gelatin, flavored or unflavored	18 months, flavored 3 years, unflavored
Herbs, dried	1-2 years
Jerky, commercially dried	12 months
Lentils, dried	12 months
Macaroni and Cheese, mix	9-12 months
Marshmallows, marshmallow creme	2-4 months
Molasses	12 months
Mushrooms, dried	6 months
Nuts, out of shell	6-12 months, bagged 12-24 months, canned
Nuts, in shell	6-12 months
Oatmeal	12 months
Oil, olive, vegetable, salad	6 months
Pasta, dry (egg noodles)	2-3 years
Pasta, dry (no egg)	2-3 years
Peanut butter	18 months
Peas, dried split	12 months
Pectin	Use by pkg. date
Popcorn, kernels	2 years
Popcorn, commercially popped and bagged	2-3 months
Popcorn, microwave packets	1 year
Potato chips	2 months
Potatoes, mashed, instant flakes	1 year
Pretzels	6-8 months
Pudding, prepared/shelf stable	1 week



SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

Rice, brown	1 year
Rice, white	2 years
Rice-based mixes	6 months
Shelf-Stable Foods cont.	Shelf Life After Code Date
Dry Goods cont.	
Sauces, cream, milk solids	1 year
Sauce mixes, non-dairy (spaghetti, taco, etc.)	2 years
Shortening, vegetable	8-12 months
Soup mixes, dry bouillon	12 months
Spices	Up to 4 years, whole spices Up to 2 years, ground spices Spices lose flavor over time but remain safe to use indefinitely
Stuffing mix	9-12 months
Sugar, brown (light or dark)	18 months
Sugar, confectioners	18 months
Sugar, white	2+ years
Sugar substitute	2 years
Tapioca	12 months
Toaster pastries	6 months, fruit 9 months, no fruit
Tomatoes, sun dried	12 months
Packed in oil	9 months
Tortillas	3 months, shelf or refrigerator
Yeast, dry packets and jars	Use by date
Shelf-Stable Beverages	Shelf Life After Code Date
Cocoa Mixes	36 months
Coffee creamer, liquid shelf stable	9-12 months
Coffee creamer, powdered	2 years
Coffee, ground	2 years
Coffee, instant	1-2 years
Coffee, whole bean	1 year, vacuum packed
Instant breakfast	6 months
Juice, bottle, shelf-stable	9 months
Juice, box	4-6 months
Juice, canned	18 months
Juice concentrate, shelf-stable	18 months
Milk, evaporated	1 year
Milk, non-fat dry	1 year
Milk, shelf stable UHT	12-18 months



SHELF LIFE GUIDELINES

Milk, sweetened condensed	1 year
Nutritional aid supplements (Boost, Ensure, etc.)	1 year
Shelf-Stable Beverages cont.	Shelf Life After Code Date
Rice milk, shelf stable	6 months
Carbonated beverages (soda, seltzer water)	3 months, bottle (all) 3 months, diet (cans) 9 months, regular soda or seltzer (cans)
Soymilk, shelf stable	6 months
Tea, bagged	18 months
Tea, instant	3 years
Tea, loose leaf	2 years
Water	Indefinite; store in a cool, dark place away from chemicals
Water, flavored	Indefinite, store in a cool, dark place away from chemicals