

# 'Best Before' vs 'Expiry' Dates

*A Health Canada report on food dating can solve long-standing disagreements on food safety.*

Checking the “best before” and “expiry date” labels on foods, from milk and cheese to bread and meats, is one of the first things you should do before putting them in your grocery cart.

When you buy food, you should be aware of the best-before date and if it has already passed, leave it on the shelf and look for something fresher.

Also, some foods with a longer shelf life and that are critical to nutrition must carry expiry dates.

Here are some other answers to common questions about the freshness of food products:

1. What's the difference between best-before vs. expiry dates on food?

**Expiration** dates tell consumers the last day a product is **safe** to consume. *Best before date* on the other hand tells you that the food is no longer in its perfect shape from that date. It may just lose its freshness, taste, aroma or nutrients. *It does not necessarily mean that the food is no longer safe to eat.*

2. Does opening a product affect the best-before or expiry dates?

Consumers need to know once they've opened a carton of yogurt, and taken that seal off, that best-before or expiry date is no longer in effect.

3. What if a food looks or smells OK, but has passed its best-before or expiry date?

Even after a best-before or expiry date has lapsed, a food may smell or taste fine, but that can be dangerous, warns Health Canada. Use your judgement when a best-before date has expired. *If you're in doubt, throw it out! However, when an expiration date has passed, there is no doubt, throw it out.*

4. Does keeping food cold or freezing it extend its best-before date?

Foods should be refrigerated within two hours of purchase for a best-before date to be valid. Refrigeration slows down but does not stop bacterial growth, so food can still go bad. Some food can be frozen to keep beyond its best-before date, but how long it can be safely frozen depends on the type of food and its ingredients.

Food photo below by Dave Takisaki on Unsplash.





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