

How long is food still edible beyond the “best before” date?



+2 months

+2 months

+28 days



+21 days

+21 days

+21 days



+2 days

+2 days

+2 days



+1 year

+1 year

+1 year

The “best before” date is not the same as the “use by” date! Some foods can still be consumed days, weeks and even months after the expiration of a “best before” date, but should first be tested by the consumer.

Shelf-lifet	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Powdered food (e.g. pudding mix, instant soup)		
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pests Stale, rancid Anything atypical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No changes: Consumption is harmless
Rice		
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fine webs, pests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If mold or pests are suspected, dispose of the entire package.
Lettuce (washed and cut)		
3 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discoloration, rotten spots, mold Moldy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wilting leaves and loss of aroma are unproblematic
Cream		
2 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discoloration, slimy consistency, separation, swelling package Sour, flavorless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No changes: Consumption is harmless
Ham		
5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greasy surface, gray or green discoloration, mold Foul, musty Bitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Store on the lowest level of the refrigerator Uncut pieces last longer than slices

Shelf-lifet	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Chocolate, pralines		
14 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pests Anything atypical or rancid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White coloration (crystallized cocoa butter and sugar) and loss of aroma are not a problem
Sweets (e.g. gummy bears)		
28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mold Unusual changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of aroma is not problematic
Tea		
Many months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pests, clumps Musty Anything atypical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of aroma is not problematic
Frozen foods		
Many months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pale spots, freezer burn (dried patches) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less crispiness and loss of aroma are not problematic If bland, can be used for soups and sauces
Sausage		
5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greasy surface, gray or green discoloration, mold Foul, musty Bitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No changes: Consumption is harmless Uncut pieces last longer than slices

What does the “best before” date mean?

Many consumers are unsure about the “best before” date, which often leads to foods that are still enjoyable landing in the trash. The “best before” date is not a “use by” date! With the “best before” date, manufacturers guarantee that their products will maintain their specific characteristics like appearance, smell, consistency, and nutritional value if they are stored correctly. As the label implies, it is at least edible up to that date.

What is the difference between the “use by” and “best before” dates?

The “use by” date identifies foods that are highly perishable, such as fresh meats and fresh fish. The label is to be understood as “consume by ...” because products with this “use by” date must be disposed of after expiration, as they pose a risk to the health of the consumer.

How can foods be tested for shelf-life after the “best before” date?

After the “best before” date, you can judge for yourself whether food is still good. Use your own senses of sight, smell and taste! The table shows in which cases a change in color, smell or taste mean that you should dispose of a certain product. If you do not notice any changes, you can consume the product with an expired “best before” date.

= appearance; = smell; = taste

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The lengths of time listed here are meant to serve as a guide; sometimes they can last even longer. Further information on the testing and shelf life of food can be found at www.tafel.de/mhd

This flyer was developed in cooperation with the Wiener Tafel and the Verbraucherzentrale Hamburg e.V.

Shelf-life	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Rolls, bread, pastries		
 2 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Mold (mold growth begins with small white spots, spreads and turns blue-green in color) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚫 Especially a soft or crispy consistency is not a problem 📌 Dry bread can be used for bread crumbs or croutons
Butter		
 21 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Rancid, anything atypical 🚫 Rancid, pungent, anything atypical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store in a closed container on the middle shelf of the refrigerator
Eggs		
 21 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Foul smelling 👁 fibrous (cooked eggs) 	<p>Test: Place the egg in a glass of water. A fresh egg sinks. A bad egg floats.</p>
Vinegar		
 Many months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Cloudy, fuzzy layer, mold 👁 Fermented 🚫 Rancid, bitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Coagulation of vegetable oils that have been cooled is not a problem
Fruit juice		
 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Moldy, formation of air bubbles 👁 Fermented 🚫 Musty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store unopened at room temperature, dark. After opening, store in the refrigerator.

Shelf-life	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Cereals		
 2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Fine webs, pests 🚫 Rancid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store dry and airtight at room temperature
Spices (Pepper, Salt, Spice mixtures)		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Clumps, pests 👁 Musty 🚫 Anything atypical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store airtight, dark and dry. Check opened packages regularly if they frequently come into contact with steam.
Honey		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Formation of bubbles 🚫 Fermented, sour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Crystallization is not a problem 📌 It becomes fluid again in a 40 °C water bath
Coffee and cocoa		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Pests, fine webs 👁 Musty or changed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Prevent contact with moisture
Cheese (Sliced + hard cheeses, not including raw milk cheeses)		
 21 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Different colored mold: green-grey, pink-white, white 👁 Musty or fermented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store on the middle shelf of the refrigerator; uncut pieces last longer than slices

Shelf-life	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Cheese (soft and cream cheeses, not including raw milk cheese)		
 10 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Different colored mold: green-grey, pink-white, white 👁 Musty or fermented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store on the middle shelf of the refrigerator; uncut pieces last longer than slices
Cheese (raw milk cheese, always labeled as such)		
0 days	Discard after expiration of the “use by” date, as there is a risk of food sickness caused by listeria.	
Cookies		
 Many months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Pungent, rancid, changed 🚫 Bitter, rancid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store in a dark, dry place at room temperature
Snacks (potato chips, peanut crisps, crackers)		
 2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Mold 👁 Rancid, pungent 🚫 Rancid, changed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store in a dark, dry place at room temperature
Preserves (canned vegetables and fruits, readymade meals)		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Mold, leaky, rusty cans, cans that are heavily dented (metal can enter the contents) 👁 Fermented, sour 🚫 Sour, metallic, putrid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Transfer the rest from the used can to another container and put it in the fridge. You can keep it 2 to 4 days after opening; follow any storage advice on the can.

Shelf-life	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Jam/marmalade		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Mold 👁 Changed, fermented 🚫 Changed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Pale color is not a problem 📌 Refrigerate after opening
Mayonnaise		
 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Mold 👁 Bad smell, changed, rancid 🚫 Rotten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Refrigerate after opening
Flour, baking powder		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Pests e.g. meal works, mites, dust mites 👁 Stale, rancid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Pest test: spread and smooth out a layer of flour; if the surface is furrowed after 30 min., mite infestation is likely
Milk, fresh		
 2 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Coagulation, curdled 👁 Sour 🚫 Sour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 No changes: Consumption is harmless
Milk, long life		
 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Slimy, bitter packaging swells 🚫 Bitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Does not curdle or turn sour (!)

Shelf-life	Dispose of product in case of these changes	Useful tips and more information
Milk products (e.g. yogurt) not including butter and cheese		
 5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Mold, puffed out packaging 👁 Changed, sour 🚫 Sour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 No changes: Consumption is harmless
Muesli (made from fruit, cereal, cornflakes, amaranth, quinoa)		
 2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Fine webs, pests, light coating on dried fruit 🚫 Rancid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Store dry and airtight at room temperature
Noodles (dry goods)		
 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Fine webs, pests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Discard entire package if mold or pests are suspected
Nuts (Walnuts, peanuts, pistachios)		
 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Pests, black spots, mold 👁 Musty, rancid 🚫 Bitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Caution: Mold development is especially dangerous with nuts, as it can cause toxic substances.
Vegetable fats/oils (margarine, olive oil, sunflower oil)		
 28 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👁 Cloudy 👁 Rancid, intense, pungent or biting taste 🚫 Rancid, bitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Coagulation does not mean a reduction in quality