

LABEL DATES

Sometimes label dates on food are confusing! Not all label dates are expiration dates. Some are just packing codes and some are packing dates. Because federal law does not require dating, there may not even be a stamped date on the product.



The examples below define the meaning of the stamped dates. Many times, the food is safe to eat past the stamped date. **Never use a can if it is bulging, leaking, or rusty, even if it has not expired.**

What it means	
A series of numbers and letters, like W15KA253XJ	This is a packing code. It is used only by the manufacturer. It is not an expiration date. Use the can within one year.
3/15/2012	This is a manufacturing date. It is not an expiration date. Use the can within one year
Nothing	If there is no expiration date, use the can within one year from when you got it.
EXP 3/15/12, USE BY 3/15/12	This is a true expiration date. After 3/15/12, the food is not safe to eat and must be thrown away. Examples are infant formula, bacon, lunch meat.
SELL BY 3/15/12, ENJOY BY 3/15/12	This is a freshness date. Food is freshest by 3/15/12, but still safe to eat after 3/15/12. Examples are milk (4-7 days after the sell by date) and eggs (2-3 weeks after the sell by date)
BEST BY 3/15/12, Best if used by 3/15/12	This is a quality date. Food has the best quality if eaten by this date. You can eat acidic canned foods up to 1 year after this date. Examples are canned tomatoes or pineapples. You can eat non-acidic canned foods up to 2-3 years after this date. Examples are canned soup or vegetables.

SOURCE: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/Food_Product_Dating/index.asp



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