



## Heart of Alabama Food Bank Food Product Shelf Life

Heart of Alabama Food Bank will frequently distribute food items after the date on the package. This food is still safe to eat. The following information will provide guidance for you to follow concerning storage life of different product categories in addition to a description of the different types of dating a manufacturer might use so that you have reference as to what they indicate.

This guide provides a list of foods that may be distributed by HAFB. However, some items that you receive may not be included in this guidance. If you have any questions arise about items that are not included in this guide, call our Quality Control and Food Safety Specialist, Joe Barnett at (334) 263-3784 ext. 317, or email [jbarnett@HAFB.org](mailto:jbarnett@HAFB.org) with your question. Mr. Barnett will determine a safe time extension for the product and in addition we will revise our guidance with the new information.

The only foods that are required by federal law to have expiration dates are infant formula and over-the-counter medications. No medicines should be distributed after the expiration date. Baby food and formula MAY NOT be distributed after expiration date. **All baby food and formula product** stored that are beyond date of expiration should be discarded and not distributed to clients.

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.

According to the USDA, Food stored constantly at 0 °F will always be safe. Only the quality suffers with lengthy freezer storage. Freezing keeps food safe by slowing the movement of molecules, causing microbes to enter a dormant stage. Freezing preserves food for extended periods because it prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause both food spoilage and foodborne illness. Because freezing keeps food safe almost indefinitely, recommended storage times are for quality only. Refer to the freezer storage chart at the end of this document, which lists optimum freezing times for best quality.

The USDA also states that if a food is not listed on the chart, you may determine its quality after thawing. First check the odor. Some foods will develop a rancid or off odor when frozen too long and should be discarded. Some may not look picture perfect or be of high enough quality to serve alone but may be edible; use them to make soups or stews.

### Here are some dates you may see on food packages:

- **Code Date:** Manufacturers may stamp numbers on products, so they know when and where they were produced. This is helpful if there is a recall and foods need to be taken off the shelf.
- **Manufacturing or Packing Date:** Product may be stamped with a date preceded by "MFG." This date can be used along with recommended shelf life for guidance on how long a product will have its best flavor and quality.



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• **Best if Used by Date:** This is the date by which the product is at its highest quality but can still be safely consumed for a period after the date. The length of time is dependent on the product and its storage.

**Expiration Date:** This is the date the manufacturer recommends the product be used by for best quality (flavor, color, texture). If stored properly, items remain safe and wholesome. However, flavor, color, and texture may change slowly.

Refer to the HAFB Agency Handbook for further guidance on food storage.

### The USDA FoodKeeper App.

You can also download the FoodKeeper App from your app store. It helps you understand food and beverages storage. It will help you maximize the freshness and quality of items. By doing so you will be able to keep items fresh longer than if they were not stored properly. It was developed by the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, with Cornell University and the Food Marketing Institute. It is also available as a mobile application for Android and Apple devices.

# Shelf Stable Food Storage Chart

FOOD	STORAGE ON SHELF	STORAGE AFTER OPENING
Canned ham (shelf-stable)	2 to 5 years	3 to 4 days in the refrigerator
Low-acid canned goods. Examples: canned meat and poultry, stews, soups (except tomato), spaghetti (noodle and pasta) products, potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, beans, beets, peas, and pumpkin.	2 to 5 years	3 to 4 days in the refrigerator
High-acid canned goods. Examples: juices (tomato, orange, lemon, lime, and grapefruit); tomatoes; grapefruit, pineapple, apples and apple products, mixed	12 to 18 months	5 to 7 days in the refrigerator



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FOOD	STORAGE ON SHELF	STORAGE AFTER OPENING
fruit, peaches, pears, plums, all berries, pickles, sauerkraut, and foods treated with vinegar-based sauces or dressings like German potato salad and sauerbraten.		
Home canned foods	12 months. Before using, boil 10 minutes for high-acid foods; 20 minutes for low-acid foods.	3 to 4 days in the refrigerator
Jerky, commercially packaged	12 months	N/A
Jerky, home-dried	1 to 2 months	N/A
Hard/dry sausage	6 weeks in pantry	3 weeks refrigerated, or until it no longer smells or tastes good.
USDA Dried Egg Mix	Store below 50 °F, preferably refrigerated, for 12 to 15 months.	Refrigerate after opening. Use within 7 to 10 days. Use reconstituted egg mix immediately or refrigerate and use within 1 hour.
Dried egg whites	Unopened dried egg products and egg white solids can be stored at room temperature as long as they are kept cool and dry. After opening, store in the refrigerator.	Refrigeration is not required unless reconstituted.
MRE's (Meal, Ready to Eat)	120 °F, 1 month 100 °F, 1 1/2 years 90 °F, 2 1/2 years 80 °F, 4 years 70 °F, 4 1/2 years 60 °F, 7 years	Refrigeration will increase the shelf-stable storage times.
Tuna and other seafood in retort pouches	18 months	3 to 4 days in the refrigerator
Meat or poultry products in retort pouches	Use manufacturer's recommendation on the package.	3 to 4 days in the refrigerator



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FOOD	STORAGE ON SHELF	STORAGE AFTER OPENING
Rice and dried pasta	2 years	After cooking, 3 to 4 days in the refrigerator

## Storage Times for Frozen Foods

**Note: Freezer storage is for quality only. Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely.**

Item	Months
Bacon and Sausage	1 to 2
Casseroles	2 to 3
Egg whites or egg substitutes	12
Frozen Dinners and Entrees	3 to 4
Gravy, meat or poultry	2 to 3
Ham, Hotdogs and Lunchmeats	1 to 2
Meat, uncooked roasts	4 to 12
Meat, uncooked steaks or chops	4 to 12
Meat, uncooked ground	3 to 4
Meat, cooked	2 to 3
Poultry, uncooked whole	12
Poultry, uncooked parts	9
Poultry, uncooked giblets	3 to 4



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Poultry, cooked	4
Soups and Stews	2 to 3
Wild game, uncooked	8 to 12

## Storage Times for Refrigerated Foods

**NOTE:** These short but safe time limits will help keep home-refrigerated food from spoiling.

<b><u>Storage Times for Refrigerated Foods</u></b>	
Ground Meat, Ground Poultry, and Stew Meat	
Ground beef, turkey, veal, pork, lamb	1-2 days
Stew meats	1-2 days
Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb, and Pork)	
Steaks, chops, roasts	3-5 days
Variety meats (Tongue, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings)	1-2 days



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Fresh Poultry	
Chicken or turkey, whole	1-2 days
Chicken or turkey, parts	1-2 days
Giblets	1-2 days
Bacon and Sausage	
Bacon	7 days
Sausage, raw from meat or poultry	1-2 days
Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days
Summer sausage labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Unopened, 3 months; Opened, 3 weeks
Hard sausage (such as Pepperoni)	2-3 weeks
Ham, Corned Beef	
Ham, canned, labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Unopened, 6-9 months; Opened, 3-5 days
Ham, fully cooked, whole	7 days



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Ham, fully cooked, half	3-5 days
Ham, fully cooked, slices	3-4 days
Corned beef in pouch with pickling juices	5-7 days
Hot Dogs and Luncheon Meats	
Hot dogs	Unopened package, 2 weeks; Opened package, 1 week
Luncheon meats	Unopened package, 2 weeks; Opened package, 3-5 days
Deli and Vacuum-Packed Products	
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, and macaroni salads	3-5 days
Pre-stuffed pork, lamb chops, and chicken breasts	1 day
Store-cooked dinners and entrees	3-4 days
Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with/USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks
Cooked Meat, Poultry, and Fish Leftovers	



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Pieces and cooked casseroles	3-4 days
Gravy and broth, patties, and nuggets	3-4 days
Soups and Stews	3-4 days
Fresh Fish and Shellfish	
Fresh Fish and Shellfish	1-2 days
Eggs	
Fresh, in shell	3-5 weeks
Raw yolks, whites	2-4 days
Hard-cooked	1 week
Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes	Unopened, 10 days; Opened, 3 days
Cooked egg dishes	3-4 days





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**Sources – Refer to the following links for updates and information:**

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/freezing-and-food-safety>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/shelf-stable-food>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/refrigeration>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating#:~:text=Manufacturers%20provide%20dating%20to%20help,not%20required%20by%20Federal%20law.>

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/pharmaceutical-quality-resources/expiration-dates-questions-and-answers>