



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.

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 products** stored that are beyond the 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.

**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 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.

Please see the table below for guidance on food storage for dry, refrigerated and frozen foods. This list is not all inclusive, be sure to contact the HAFB Food Safety and Quality Control Coordinator, Ethan Edgar at 334-263-3784 Extension 337 or at [eedgar@hafb.org](mailto:eedgar@hafb.org). Mr. Edgar will determine a safe time extension for the product and in addition we will revise our guidance with the new information.



**STORAGE LIFE FOR SHELF STABLE, REFRIGERATED AND FROZEN FOODS**

**SHELF STABLE FOOD**

<b><u>FOOD</u></b>	<b><u>STORAGE ON SHELF</u></b>	<b><u>STORAGE AFTER OPENING</u></b>
Canned Ham	2-5 Years	3-4 Days in the Refrigerator
Low Acid Canned Goods - Examples: Canned meat and poultry, stews, soups (except tomato), spaghetti noodles and pasta products, potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, beans, beets, peas and pumpkin	2-5 Years	3-4 Days in the Refrigerator
High Acid Canned Goods. Examples: Juices (tomato, orange, lemon, lime and grapefruit, tomatoes, pineapple, apples and apple products mixed	12-18 Months	5-7 Days in the Refrigerator
Home Canned Goods	12 Months-Before using boil 10 minutes for high acid foods and 20 minutes for low acid foods	3-4 Days in the Refrigerator
Jerky, Commercially Packaged	12 Months	N/A
Jerky, Home Dried	6 Weeks	N/A
Hard/Dry Sausage	6 Weeks	3 Weeks Refrigerated (or until it no longer smells good.)
USDA Dried Egg Mix	Store below 50° F preferably refrigerated for 12-15 Months	Refrigerate after opening and use within 7-10 days Use reconstituted egg mix immediately or within one hour if refrigerated
Dried Egg Whites	Can be stored unopened in a cool dry area.	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 and 60° F 7 Years	Refrigeration increases the shelf storage time
Tuna and other Seafood in Retort Pouches	18 Months	3-4 Days in the Refrigerator
Meat or Poultry Products in Retort Pouches	Use the Manufacturer's Recommendation	3-4 Days in the Refrigerator
Rice and Dried Pasta	2 Years	After Cooking 3-4 Days in the Refrigerator



<b><u>FROZEN FOOD</u></b>	
<b><u>FOOD</u></b>	<b><u>STORAGE IN FREEZER</u></b>
Bacon and Sausage	1-2 Months
Casseroles	2-3 Months
Egg Whites & Egg Substitutes	12 Months
Frozen Dinner and Entrees	3-4 Months
Gravy, Meat or Poultry	2-3 Months
Ham, Hot Dogs, Lunchmeat	1-2 Months
Meat, Uncooked Roast	4-12 Months
Meat, Uncooked Steaks or Chops	4-12 Months
Meat, Uncooked Ground	3-4 Months
Meat, Cooked	2-3 Months
Poultry, Uncooked Whole	12 Months
Poultry, Uncooked Parts	9 Months
Poultry, Uncooked Giblets	3-4 Months
Poultry, Cooked	4 Months
Soups and Stews	2-3 Months
Wild Game, Uncooked	8-12 Months
<b><u>REFRIGERATED FOODS</u></b>	
<b><u>FOOD</u></b>	<b><u>STORAGE IN REFRIGERATOR</u></b>
<b><u>GROUND MEAT, GROUND POULTRY, STEW MEAT</u></b>	
Ground Beef, Turkey, Veal, Pork, Lamb	1-2 Days
Stew Meats	1-2 Days
<b><u>FRESH MEAT - BEEF, VEAL, LAMB, PORK</u></b>	
Steaks, Chops, Roast	3-5 Days
Variety Meats (Tongue, Kidney, Liver, Heart, Chitterlings)	1-2 Days
<b><u>FRESH POULTRY</u></b>	
Chicken or Turkey Whole	1-2 Days
Chicken or Turkey Parts	1-2 Days
Giblets	1-2 Days
<b><u>BACON AND SAUSAGE</u></b>	
Bacon	7 Days
Sausage, raw -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
<b><u>HAM AND CORNED BEEF</u></b>	
Ham, canned, labeled "Keep Refrigerated"	Unopened, 6-9 months, Opened 3-5 Months
Ham, fully cooked, whole	6 days
Ham, fully cooked, half	3-5 days
Ham, Fully Cooked Slices	3-4 days
Corned Beef in Pouch with Pickling Juices	5-7 days
<b><u>HOT DOGS AND LUNCHEON MEATS</u></b>	
Hot Dogs	Unopened Package- 2 Weeks, Opened package, 1 week
	Opened package, 3-5 days, Unopened Package 2 Weeks
<b><u>DELI AND VACUUM-PACKED PRODUCTS</u></b>	
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
<b><u>COOKED MEAT, POULTRY AND FISH LEFTOVERS</u></b>	
Pieces and cooked casseroles	3-4 days
Gravy and broth, patties, and nuggets	3-4 days
Soups and Stews	3-4 days
<b><u>FRESH FISH AND SHELLFISH</u></b>	
Fresh Fish and Shellfish	1-2 Days
<b><u>EGGS</u></b>	
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

**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>