

KNOW YOUR LABELS: BEST BEFORE DATE VS. EXPIRY DATE



Are you sitting down?

Yogurt with a best before date of today is still good (and safe) to eat for seven to 10 days whether open or unopened.

Reading best before dates as expiry dates probably contributes to food waste and every year a staggering amount of the world's food is wasted after it has been harvested. That's wasted fruit and vegetables, fish and seafood, cereals, dairy products and meat.

Let's change that.

Source: [Queen of Green - David Suzuki Foundation](#)

Packaged food items have many food labels that can be really confusing. In Canada the most common food date labels are: Best Before Dates, Packaging Dates and Expiry Dates. Knowing the difference between these terms help consumers to make informed decisions about the food being purchase.

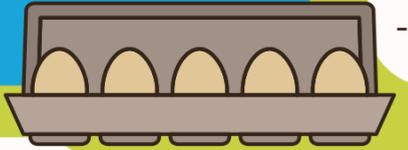
The Best Before Date is an indication of food QUALITY not food safety. It provides consumers information about the freshness and potential shelf-life of unopened, properly stored food. This must appear on pre-packaged foods that will keep fresh for 90 days or less. It is important to note that a best-before date is not the same as an expiration date.

Best Before Date

A Best Before Date indicates the estimated amount of time that a properly stored and unopened package will retain its freshness, taste or nutritional value. In Canada, this is usually found on the label with the words "best before", "BB", "meilleur avant" or "MA".

The Best Before Date is not an indicator of food safety, but it can potentially tell you the shelf life of the unopened foods you are buying.

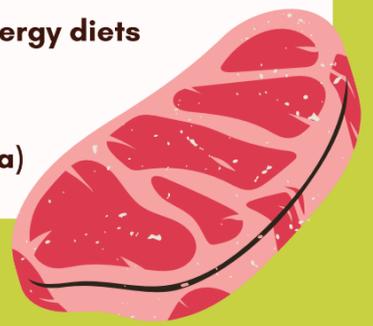
Source: [Second Harvest Training](#)



Expiry Date

Products with an Expiry Date MUST NOT be consumed after that date has passed. The Expiry Date is required on certain foods that have strict nutrition specifications. There are only 5 types of food that have expiry dates in Canada:

- Formulated Liquid diets
- Pharmacist-sold food for low energy diets
- Meal Replacements
- Nutritional Supplements
- Human Milk Substitutes (Formula)



Packaging Date

Packaging dates are found on food that will keep fresh for 90 days or less, packaged at the retails store where they are sold. They are labeled with either a Best Before date and care instructions or accompany information on the durable life of food (the number of days a product will remain it's freshest).

Past "best before" date?

You can buy and eat foods after the "best before" date has passed. It may have lost some of its freshness, flavour and nutritional value, and its texture may have changed.

Remember, "best before" dates are not indicators of food safety. They apply to unopened products only. Once opened, the shelf life of a food may change.

Source: [How to read food date labels and packaging - Canada.ca](#)

A great deal of food waste is caused by this misinformation around Best Before dates, with folks thinking that once the best before date has passed that the food item is "expired".



Image Source: [Second Harvest Training](#)

Reading these labels

Best Before dates in Canada are always written in the same format: Year/Month/Day.

If the year is not needed for clarity, the date will be written as Month, Day.

- JA: January
- FE: February
- MR: March
- AL: April
- MA: May
- JN: June
- JL: July
- AU: August
- SE: September
- OC: October
- NO: November
- DE: December

So.... Should we eat foods after the Best Before Date or Toss them?

The fact is, there is no easy answer to this... we're talking about organic material that is subject to all sorts of variables along the food chain. We have to make our own judgement calls based on our food knowledge combined with information from reliable, trusted sources.

If you are wondering how long after a best before date you can safely eat eggs, milk, mustard, cereal, etc.? Check out [Love Food Hate Waste](#) for storage and consumption time limits.

