

Newsflash

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How to Tell if Your Food Is Still Fresh

The right way to decode those sell-by and use-by dates on packages

With the holidays around the corner, you're probably making your shopping list for the big feast. While checking your cupboards for supplies, you find a bag of stuffing mix with a "best by" date of Nov. 1, 2015. Is it still safe to use on Thanksgiving? Surprisingly, yes. In most cases, eating food that has been on the shelf – or even in the fridge – past the date on the package won't put you at high risk for foodborne illness.

Then why are best-by, sell-by, use-by, and other dates plastered all over food packaging? Most consumers don't realize that they're really more about food quality than food safety. A food may not be at its peak after the date on the package, but staleness, color changes, and the like are quality problems, not safety concerns. Foods may develop mold, become rancid, or spoil in other ways, but they are likely to look, smell and taste disgusting before they become unsafe.

When it comes to safety, though, you can't automatically assume that chicken or ground beef is guaranteed not to contain harmful bacteria before the label date. The truth is, the bugs responsible for the annual 48 million illnesses and 3,000 deaths from foodborne pathogens don't cause spoilage. If they're in a fresh food, they'll be there even when it's fresh. And unlike mold, sliminess, and other signs of spoilage, you can't see or smell them.

DEFINING DATES

The federal government doesn't require foods except for infant formula to carry a date label, and the concern there is nutrients not safety. Several states have regulations, but the guidelines used to set the dates and the meaning of terms vary from state to state. To help consumers, the USDA offers these general definitions:

"Sell by." Manufacturers suggest that retailers remove the product from shelves by this date. The goal: to assure quality for a period of time after the consumer buys it. That can be several days to several weeks, depending on the food. For instance, milk, assuming proper refrigeration, should last five to seven days past the sell-by date before turning sour.

"Best by" and "use by." These terms tell the consumer when to eat (or freeze) a food for best quality. For example, a jar of salsa may not taste as fresh and tangy as it's supposed to or crackers may be soft instead of crispy after those dates.

But in the majority of cases, manufacturers decide on their own terms and dates – based on their own product testing. According to a report from the Natural Resources Defense Council and Harvard University, manufacturers use a number of methods, such as lab tests and taste testing, to set them, but consumers have no way of knowing how the dates were determined. In many cases, the dates are conservative and you may notice no quality difference – especially if the date recently passed. They're better used as general suggestions, not hard-and-fast deadlines, so if something you have at home is past the date, don't be so quick to toss it.

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According to ProCare Rx's analytics team, the drug inflation rates year-to-date are as follows:

ALL DRUGS 0.29%
BRANDS 0.54%
GENERICS -1.29%
SPECIALTY 0.28%

Generic Releases

The following brand drugs have lost their patents:

Drug	Condition	Date
Orap	Antipsychotic	Sept 28
Epiduo	Acne	Sept 30
Aloxi Injection	Nausea and vomiting	Oct 13
Namenda Solution	Alzheimer's	Oct 13

While we have done extensive research on these dates, there is a possibility that any given date may change based on legal issues or patent challenges. If we become aware of any changes, we will update this chart in the next issue.

Formulary Changes

For a complete list of formulary changes, please visit our website at <http://www.procarerx.com>

Drug	Condition	New Tier
Praluent Injection	High Cholesterol	Tier 2

Previous issues of Newsflash can be viewed under "Publications" at: www.ProCareRx.com



The following **New Drugs** were recently approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration and added to ProCare Rx's National formulary. Each drug will be reviewed at the next ProCare Rx's P&T Committee meeting.

Brand Name	Dose Form	FDA Approved Indication	Tier	P/A Specialty Medical
Aristada (aripiprazole lauroxil)	Injection	Treatment for schizophrenia	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Belbuca (buprenorphine hydrochloride)	Oral	Treatment for chronic pain	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Coagadex (coagulation factor X (human))	Injection	Treatment for hereditary factor X deficiency	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Dyanavel XR (amphetamine)	Oral	Treatment for ADHD	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Enstilar (betamethasone dipropionate and calcipotriene)	Injection	Treatment for plaque psoriasis	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Imlygic (talimogene laherparepvec)	Injection	Treatment for melanoma	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
MorphaBond ER (morphine sulfate)	Oral	Treatment for pain	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Onivyde (irinotecan liposomal)	Injection	Treatment for pancreatic cancer	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Praxbind (idarucizumab)	Injection	Treatment for reversal agent for pradaxa	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Seebri (glycopyrrolate)	Inhaler	Treatment for COPD	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Strensiq (asfotase alfa)	Injection	Treatment for hypophosphatasia	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Utibron (glycopyrrolate and indacaterol)	Inhaler	Treatment for COPD	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Veltassa (patiomer)	Oral	Treatment for hyperkalemia	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Vivlodex (meloxicam)	Oral	Treatment for osteoarthritis	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No
Yondelis (trabectedin)	Injection	Treatment for soft tissue sarcoma	Tier 3	Prior Auth: No Specialty: No Medical: No

How to Tell if Your Food Is Still Fresh *(continued)*

FOOD-SAFETY SMARTS

Focus on these five tips to stay safe during the holidays and throughout the year:

Watch out for mold. Some types cause allergies or respiratory problems; others can produce mycotoxins that can make you sick. Even if the mold is in one spot, discard the food. (Skip the sniff test; certain spores can be inhaled.) There are some exceptions. Surface mold on hard salami and dry-cured country hams can be scrubbed off. Also, for hard cheeses (such as cheddar and Parmesan), firm vegetables (such as bell peppers and carrots), and cheeses made with mold (such as Gorgonzola), you can cut off the mold and about an inch around it and use the rest of the food.

Know how to battle the bad bugs. Keep raw meat cold (37° F or colder) and cooked meat warm (140° F or warmer) to prevent bacterial growth. Defrost meat in the fridge, cook thoroughly, and refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours. Don't let raw meat or its juices touch other foods, and wash your hands, cutting boards, and utensils in warm, soapy water.

Use a meat thermometer. Tricks such as wiggling the turkey leg, checking the color of roast beef, and piercing chicken with a fork to see whether the juices run clear are unreliable. You need to be sure that meat has reached a safe temperature: 145° F for beef roasts, pork roasts, and fresh ham (140° F for precooked hams you reheat), and 165° F for chicken and turkey.

Consider avoiding certain foods. Refrigeration slows the growth of most pathogens, such as E. coli, norovirus, or salmonella, but not listeria. Deli meat is a top source of listeria. The meat may not contain enough of the bacteria to make you sick when you first buy it, but the bacteria multiply with time, so you want to eat it within a few days. Older adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems are more susceptible to listeria infection, and the USDA recommends that they avoid eating deli meats and hot dogs unless those foods first reach a temperature of 165° F. Ready-to-eat refrigerated foods, smoked seafood, pâtés, meat spreads, and blue-veined and soft cheeses such as Brie, feta, and queso fresco are also risky.

Use your eyes and nose. Regardless of the package date, avoid food that's obviously spoiled. If your eyesight or sense of smell can't be trusted, have a friend or family member check out the food for you, or simply discard it when you're in doubt. Never taste a food that you suspect has gone bad.

