

DATE LABELS EXPLAINED

Date labels on packaged food can be confusing. There are no laws or regulations requiring food manufacturers to label their products and there are no industry standards for what the different date label terms such as "Best by" or "Sell by" mean.

Almost all date labels are for quality and not safety. Manufacturers use these dates to inform consumers of the date that they can expect desired quality, flavor, and nutrition to still be in the product.

Date Label	What foods have this date label?	Type of Label	Purpose	Is Food Safe to Eat After this Date?
Packed Date	Commercially Packaged	Quality	Date product was packaged. Used for tracking and recalls.	Yes
Manufactured Date	Commercially Packaged	Quality	Date product was made. Used for tracking and recalls.	Yes
Sell By Date	Commercially Packaged	Quality	Quality date that tells the store how long to display the product for sale.	Yes
Best By Date	Commercially Packaged	Quality	Last day of peak quality.	Yes
Use By Date	Commercially Packaged	Quality	Last day of peak quality.	Yes
Expiration Date	Commercially Packaged	Quality	Last day of peak quality.	Yes
Date Mark	Refrigerated foods prepared and packaged in a restaurant or grocery store	Safety	Date (7 days after preparation) Listeria may have grown in the product. Listeria can cause miscarriages in pregnant women and illness or death in immunocompromised people.	No

Infant Formula: Infant formula is the one item that should not be consumed after the date on the label. The nutritional value of infant formula can only be guaranteed until the date. Since formula is often the ONLY source of nutrition for babies, it can be very dangerous to consume expired product.

