



# 'Best By' vs. 'Use By' What's the Difference?

Food labels can be confusing, but they don't have to lead to waste! Here's what those dates really mean:



## Best if Used By/Before

This means the food will taste its best by this date. It's about quality, *not* safety. Most foods are still fine to eat after this.



## Sell-By

This date helps stores with stocking and inventory. It doesn't mean the food is bad after that date, and you've usually got some time!



## Use-By

This is the last date the maker suggests using the product for peak quality. It's *not* about safety – unless it's baby formula, which does expire.



## Freeze-By

This tells you when to pop it in the freezer for best taste and texture later. It's not a deadline for safety or buying.



### Trust Your Senses

Even if the date says it's still good, always check for signs of spoilage before eating.

- Mold, unusual colors, or a slimy film? Time to let it go.
- If it smells sour, rotten, or off, toss it.
- If it tastes weird or off, don't risk it.
- Sticky, slimy, or overly soft when it shouldn't be? Nope.

Almost **90%** of Americans throw out food too early because of confusion about date labels. You're not alone, but you can be part of the solution!



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Sources: USDA Food Product Dating ([fsis.usda.gov](https://fsis.usda.gov)); Center for Science in the Public Interest ([cspinet.org](https://cspinet.org))