

Canned Goods Expiration-Date Guide

For pantry rotation and best quality. Use the shorter end first and always inspect the container before distribution or use.



Most dates are about quality - not an automatic discard date

Except for infant formula, federal law does not require quality-based dates on packaged foods. USDA storage ranges below assume an unopened commercial container in good condition. Follow a labeled safety-based use-by date or a shorter manufacturer instruction. [1, 3]

UNOPENED = sealed package in a cool, clean, dry pantry. **AFTER OPENING** = close tightly and refrigerate when listed.

Low-acid canned foods UNOPENED 2-5 years OPENED 3-4 days refrigerated Meat, poultry, fish, beans, most vegetables, non-tomato soups and stews. Evaporated / condensed milk UNOPENED 12 months OPENED 4-5 days refrigerated Transfer leftovers to a covered container.	High-acid canned foods UNOPENED 12-18 months OPENED 5-7 days refrigerated Tomatoes, fruit, juices, pickles, sauerkraut, vinegar-based foods. Shelf-stable milk carton UNOPENED 6-12 months OPENED 5-7 days refrigerated Refrigerate promptly after opening.	Shelf-stable canned ham UNOPENED 2-5 years OPENED 3-4 days refrigerated Only products not labeled Keep Refrigerated. Canned coconut milk UNOPENED 2-5 years OPENED 4 days refrigerated Cover and refrigerate after opening.	Tuna / seafood retort pouch UNOPENED 18 months OPENED 3-4 days refrigerated Flexible shelf-stable pouch; discard if swollen or leaking. Commercial jerky UNOPENED 12 months OPENED Follow package after opening Keep sealed, cool, and dry.
DO NOT USE OR DISTRIBUTE Discard leaking, bulging, badly dented, heavily rusted, cracked, or unsealed containers. Never taste suspicious food. If a container spurts liquid or has a foul odor when opened, keep people and animals away and discard it safely. [1]		STORE & ROTATE Keep shelf-stable food in a cool, clean, dry place; below 85°F is best. Keep away from stoves, plumbing, damp basements, garages, and temperature extremes. Mark receipt dates and use first-in, first-out rotation. [1]	

Scope: Commercially packaged products only. Foods labeled *Keep Refrigerated* are not shelf stable. Infant formula is excluded: FDA requires a use-by date, which must be followed. [1, 3]

Processed Foods Expiration-Date Guide

Unopened times start from purchase. Opened times assume clean handling, tight closure, and the listed pantry or refrigerator storage.



Use condition, date labels, and storage history together

A Best if Used By date generally indicates peak flavor and quality. For food past that date, inspect for noticeable changes in color, consistency, texture, odor, package integrity, pests, or moisture. When in doubt, discard it. [2, 3]

UNOPENED = sealed package in a cool, clean, dry pantry. **AFTER OPENING** = close tightly and refrigerate when listed.

Dry pasta (no egg) UNOPENED 2 years OPENED 1 year in pantry	White / wild rice UNOPENED 2 years OPENED 1 year in pantry	Brown rice UNOPENED 1 year OPENED 1 year in pantry	Dried beans UNOPENED 1-2 years OPENED 1 year in pantry	Ready-to-eat cereal UNOPENED 6-12 months OPENED 2-3 months in pantry
Oatmeal / hot cereal UNOPENED 12 months OPENED 6-12 months in pantry	Crackers UNOPENED 8 months OPENED 1 month in pantry	White flour UNOPENED 6-12 months OPENED 6-8 months in pantry	Commercial peanut butter UNOPENED 6-24 months OPENED 2-3 months in pantry	Jams / jellies / preserves UNOPENED 6-18 months OPENED 6-12 months refrigerated
Ketchup / chili sauce UNOPENED 1 year OPENED 6 months refrigerated	Mustard UNOPENED 1-2 years OPENED 1 year refrigerated	Commercial mayonnaise UNOPENED 3-6 months OPENED 2 months refrigerated	Olive / vegetable oil UNOPENED 6-12 months OPENED 3-5 months in pantry	Powdered milk UNOPENED 3-5 years OPENED 3 months in pantry
AFTER OPENING Refrigerate items when this chart says refrigerated, keep the refrigerator at 40°F or below, and label the opening date. Use a clean utensil to avoid introducing contamination.		PACKAGE OVERRIDES Follow storage directions and safety-based use-by dates on the package. If the label gives a shorter time than this chart, use the shorter time. [2, 3]		

Primary sources - official U.S. government guidance and data. Reviewed August 14, 2026.

1. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, [Shelf-Stable 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/shelf-stable-food>
2. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, [FoodKeeper Data](https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/fsis-foodkeeper-data) (dataset updated Jan. 22, 2025): <https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/fsis-foodkeeper-data>
3. U.S. Food and Drug Administration, [How to Cut Food Waste and Maintain Food Safety](https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/how-cut-food-waste-and-maintain-food-safety): <https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/how-cut-food-waste-and-maintain-food-safety>

Illustrations are original AI-generated 3D-inspired artwork created for this chart; they are decorative and do not determine product safety.