

How to tell if food is spoiled when you can't smell

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Future You Nutrition

Official Guidance



- According to the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):
- If the date [on your food] passes during **home storage**, a product should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident," according to FSIS.
- You can tell if a food is spoiled if it has an off [**odor**], **flavor**, (**color**) or **texture**

Dates



- **Use these dates when grocery shopping and for unopened foods:**
 - **Best If Used By/Before:** This is a quality assurance date and serves as a "suggestion" for when the taste and quality of food are at their peak. It is not a purchase or safety date.
 - **Use By:** This is the suggested date by when you should *eat* the food. But just because it's a day or two past the use-by date doesn't mean that consuming it will make you sick, although you should evaluate the quality of the food yourself after this time. It is not a safety date, except when used on infant formula.
 - **Sell By:** This is not a safety date, but rather a date for retailers that helps them determine how long an item should remain on the shelf. According to the IFT, "one-third of a product's shelf-life remains after the sell-by date for the consumer to use at home."
 - **Freeze By:** According to the USDA, this date indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

General Guidance

- Does it LOOK different?
- Does it TASTE different?
- Is the COLOR different?
- Is the CONSISTENCY different? (Watery, separated)



Top Ten Tips



- **1. Check the Expiration Date**
- **2. Inspect the Appearance**
 - Look for signs of mold, discoloration, or unusual textures. For instance:
- **Meats:** Any sliminess or color changes (e.g., grayish or greenish hues) may indicate spoilage.
 - **Dairy:** Curdling, separation, or a change in texture can signal souring or spoilage.
 - **Fruits and Vegetables:** Soft spots, wrinkling, or a slimy texture can indicate deterioration.
- **3. Feel the Texture**
 - Gently squeeze or press on the food. For example:
 - **Fruits and Vegetables:** They should not feel excessively soft, mushy, or overly firm unless they are naturally so.
 - **Meats:** Fresh meats should be firm, not slimy or sticky.
- **4. Use a Food Thermometer**
 - When reheating food or checking leftovers, using a food thermometer can ensure that the food has been heated to a safe temperature (above 165°F or 74°C for most cooked foods). This helps avoid bacterial growth.
- **5. Check for Bubbling or Off-Looking Liquid**
 - In fermented or canned products, look for bulging cans or bubbling liquid that could indicate the presence of bacteria or fermentation. For homemade products, this could also be a sign of spoilage.

Top Ten Tips (continued)



- **6. Observe for Separation**

- **Yogurt, cream, or sauces:** If the food separates into water and solid chunks or has unusual clumping, it could be spoiled.

- **7. Look for Leaks in Packaging**

- If food is in sealed packaging and you notice any leaks or tears, it may have been compromised and is more likely to spoil.

- **8. Use a Digital Reminder for Checking Dates**

- If you're having difficulty remembering when food was purchased or when it expires, consider setting a digital reminder on your phone or using an app to track expiration dates.

- **9. Frozen Foods**

- If you're unsure about the quality of frozen food, check for freezer burn or ice crystals that have formed on the surface. This doesn't necessarily mean the food is unsafe but could affect its taste and texture.

Food Safety Habits



- Wash your hands frequently before and during food preparation
- Keep raw meat separate from produce and other foods
- Don't let perishable items sit at room temperature — or anywhere in the “danger zone” of [40 to 140 degrees](#) — for more than two hours after they were cooked or prepared.
- Portion leftovers into shallow containers — which help foods cool more quickly than if they were in deeper ones — and they refrigerate or freeze them right away.
- With safe cooking and quick cooling, some may feel comfortable eating leftovers for up to seven days after the meal.
- Those who are pregnant, 65 or older [or immunocompromised](#) may want to be more cautious and follow the federal guidance to throw leftovers out after three to four days. It's safest to use a food thermometer and reheat leftovers to 165 degrees, which kills listeria.

Refrigeration Times for Meat



- **Raw Meat**

- 1. Beef, Lamb, and Pork:**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 3 to 5 days.
2. **Storage:** Keep these in their original packaging or wrap them tightly with plastic wrap or foil. If possible, place them on a plate or tray to catch any juices that may leak.

- 2. Ground Meat (Beef, Pork, Lamb, etc.):**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 1 to 2 days.
2. **Storage:** Store in its original packaging or re-wrap tightly. Ground meat spoils faster than whole cuts due to the increased surface area exposed to air.

- 3. Poultry (Chicken, Turkey, etc.):**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 1 to 2 days.
2. **Storage:** Wrap tightly in plastic wrap, foil, or place in an airtight container. Raw poultry should always be stored on the bottom shelf of the fridge to prevent cross-contamination.

- 4. Fish and Shellfish:**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 1 to 2 days.
2. **Storage:** Store on a plate, cover tightly, and ensure it's on the coldest shelf of the fridge. Fresh fish should be kept in the coldest part of the refrigerator (around 32°F or 0°C).

- **Cooked Meat**

- 1. Beef, Pork, and Lamb (Cooked):**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 3 to 4 days.
2. **Storage:** Store cooked meat in airtight containers or tightly wrap in foil or plastic wrap.

- 2. Poultry (Cooked):**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 3 to 4 days.
2. **Storage:** Store cooked poultry in an airtight container or wrap it tightly.

- 3. Cooked Fish or Shellfish:**

1. **Refrigerator Time:** 2 to 3 days.
2. **Storage:** Store cooked fish and shellfish in airtight containers.

Chill Time

REFRIGERATOR STORAGE TIMES

	BEEF	CHICKEN	SALMON
RAW	 <p>3-5 DAYS</p> <p>FREEZER: 6-12 MONTHS</p>	 <p>1-2 DAYS</p> <p>FREEZER: 9 MONTHS</p>	 <p>1-2 DAYS</p> <p>FREEZER: 6-8 MONTHS</p>
COOKED	 <p>3-4 DAYS</p> <p>FREEZER: 2-6 MONTHS</p>	 <p>3-4 DAYS</p> <p>FREEZER: 2-6 MONTHS</p>	 <p>3-4 DAYS</p> <p>FREEZER: 2-6 MONTHS</p>



Veggie Time

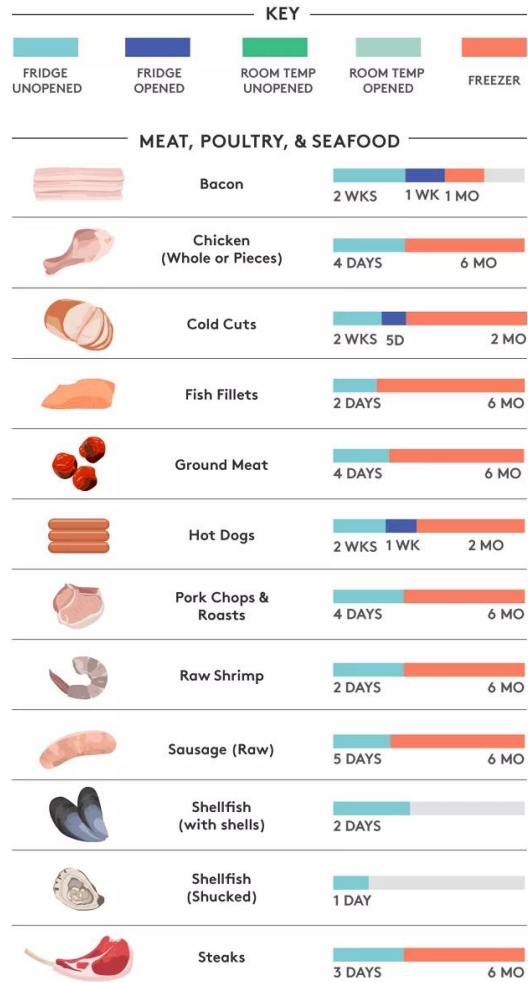


- **General Tips for Maximizing Freshness:**
 - **Use the crisper drawer:** It's designed to maintain optimal humidity for most vegetables.
 - **Avoid washing before storage:** Excess moisture encourages mold and decay.
 - **Check regularly:** Some vegetables may spoil quickly if one piece starts decaying. Remove it promptly.
- Onions 1-2 months
- Carrots, Potatoes 2-3 weeks
- Squash, Leeks, Bell Peppers, Cauliflower 1-2 weeks
- Cucumbers, Zucchini, Green Beans 1 week
- Mushrooms, Leafy Greens 3-7 days
- Broccoli, Tomatoes 3-5 days
- Asparagus 3-4 days

Is it Still Good?

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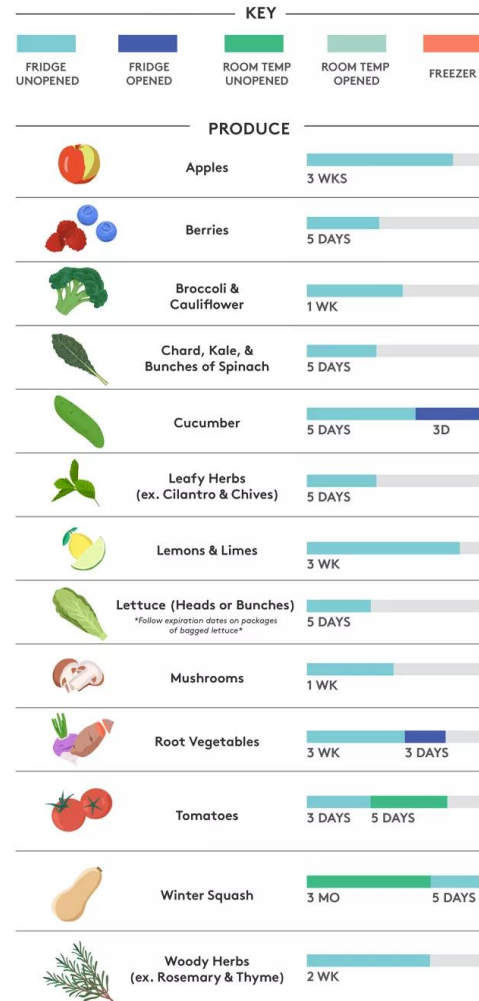
HOW LONG YOU CAN KEEP (ALMOST) ANYTHING IN THE Fridge, Freezer, & Pantry



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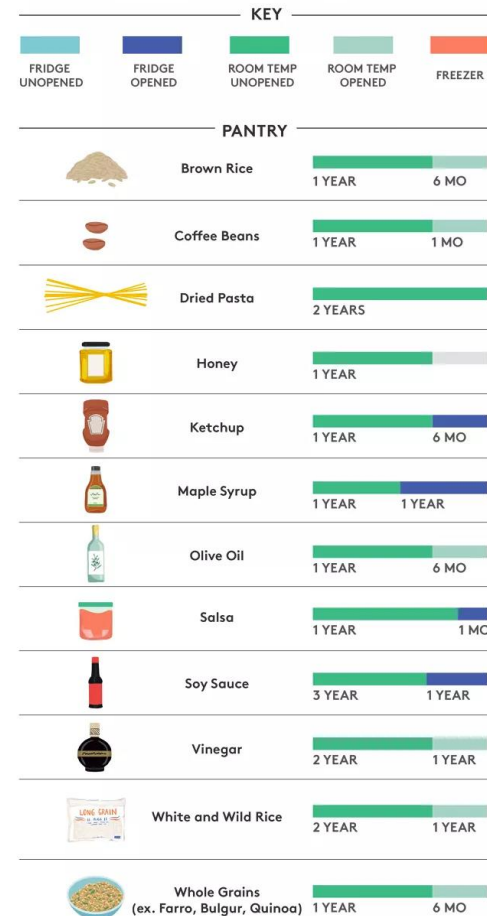
HOW LONG YOU CAN KEEP (ALMOST) ANYTHING IN THE Fridge, Freezer, & Pantry



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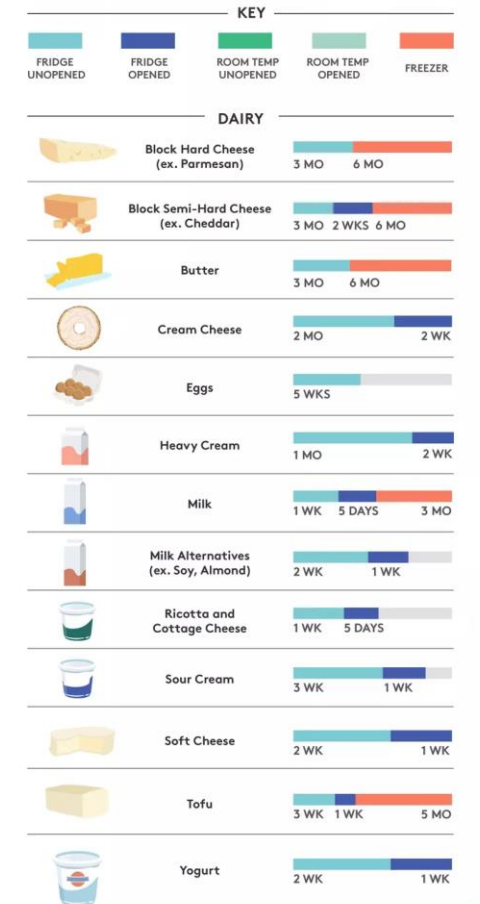
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HOW LONG YOU CAN KEEP (ALMOST) ANYTHING IN THE Fridge, Freezer, & Pantry



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Use Technology...

- Fridge Buddy - iOS and android
- Frigely – iOS and android
- Pantry Buddy – iOS only
- Food Expiration Tracker – iOS and android
- Spoilist – iOS only
- Fridge Hero - iOS and android
- Expiry Tracker – iOS and android



Helpful products



3M Post-it Labeling Tape

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00BX9P54S?>



ThermoWorks Instant Read Thermopen

<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=thermoworks+thermapen+one>



LavaTools Javelin Pro Instant Read Thermometer

<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Lavatoools+Javelin+PRO+Duo>

UPFs in the News





- Washington Post
 - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2025/01/07/healthier-ultra-processed-foods/>
 - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/06/27/ultra-processed-foods-predigested-health-risks/>
- New York Times
 - <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/01/05/well/eat/ultraprocessed-foods-challenge-quiz.html>

Upcoming sessions

- February – Feb 13 – Tracking apps
- March – Mar 13 – Bread, Bread, Bread



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Sources

- <https://www.realsimple.com/food-recipes/shopping-storing/food/food-expiration-dates-guidelines-chart>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/28/well/eat/how-long-do-thanksgiving-leftovers-last.html>