

AFRA BEST BEFORE GUIDELINES

Understanding date marks

Best-before dates indicate how long a product is expected to remain at its best quality. Food past its best-before date is generally still safe to eat, although taste, texture, or appearance may decline. If there are clear signs of spoilage, the food should not be consumed.

As a practical guide: if it looks and smells fine, it is usually safe. It is not illegal to sell or donate food past its best-before date.

For more information on understanding date marks, see Consumer NZ's guide:

<https://www.consumer.org.nz/articles/use-by-dates-on-food>

Important: Never distribute or eat food that has passed its use-by date. The use-by date is a safety limit, not a quality limit.

A note on freezing: Products can be frozen on or before their best-before date to extend shelf life. Imported items or those that have been previously frozen must not be refrozen.

Category	Product	Redistribute within...
Dairy	Fresh milk and cream	5 days of best-before date
	Yoghurt, sour cream, cottage cheese	1 week of best-before date
	Eggs (clean, intact, properly stored)	2 weeks of best-before date
	Soft cheese (brie, camembert)	2 weeks of best-before date
	Hard cheese	3 weeks of best-before date
	Mayonnaise, hollandaise, tartare sauce	1 month of best-before date
Meat	Fresh or cured meat (not shellfish)	On or before best-before date only - freeze immediately or distribute same day
Bread	Fresh bread	2 days of best-before date
	Packaged breads	10 days of best-before date
Drinks (unopened)	Smoothies (pasteurised)	2 days of best-before date
	Juices	1 week of best-before date
	Fizzy drinks	6 months of best-before date

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Food Type	Product	Redistribute...
Ready meals	Salads (bags and pottles)	On or before best-before date only
	Single-serve or bulk prepared meals	On or before best-before date only
	Fresh pies, pizzas, quiches (no chicken or seafood)	3 days of best-before date - AFRA operational guideline, not a food safety standard
	Fresh soups (plastic pouches)	2 weeks of best-before date
Other	Tofu	1 week of best-before date
	Dips including hummus	1 week of best-before date
	Packaged chips, biscuits, crackers	1 month of best-before date
	Chocolate and sweets	2 months of best-before date
	Dried nuts and fruits	3 months of best-before date
	Packaged cereals and muesli bars	6 months of best-before date
	Spreads and chutneys	6 months of best-before date
	Canned goods	1 year of best-before date
	Dried bulk goods (flour, sugar, oats, etc.)	1 year of best-before date

About these guidelines

These guidelines are based on information originally collated from the international reference resource www.eatbydate.com, which aggregates data from food safety authorities and manufacturers worldwide. The guidelines have been reviewed and endorsed by AFRA members based on their practical experience in food rescue, and represent AFRA's recommended operational practice for the redistribution of food past its best-before date.

These are guidelines only. They are not derived from MPI regulations. You should always use your judgement when assessing food past its best-before date. If in doubt, do not give it out.