

WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for November 29, 2021
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, & Healthy Relationships we'll talk about whether you need to throw out that food that is past the date on the package, and as always, look at some upcoming programs from OSU Extension.

Within a couple of hours last week, I had two different calls about eating food past the date on the package. In case you've recently thought that yourself, here is some good information to know.

According to the USDA, there are two types of product dating that may be shown on a product label. "Open dating" is a calendar date applied by the manufacturer or retailer. This is an estimate for consumers of when the product will be the best quality. It can also help the store to know how long to display the food for sale. A different code that is printed on a package with a series of letters and/or numbers allows the manufacturer to know when the product was produced and possibly other information like the manufacturing location or production line. This is called "closed dating."

When it comes to shelf-life labeling, there are no uniform or universally accepted descriptions used on food labels for open dating. Some commonly used phrases include:

- A "Best if Used By/Before" date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A "Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.
- A "Use-By" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except when used on infant formula. (The vitamins and nutrients can deteriorate over time. Since this is the sole nutrition for an infant, it would be unsafe if consumed after the date.)

Most shelf-stable foods are safe indefinitely. Commercially canned goods will last for years, if the can itself is in good condition (no rust, dents, or swelling). Packaged foods such as cereal, pasta, and cookies, will eventually become stale or develop off flavors after the date on the

package. Check the food before tossing it out. You will know when you open the package if the food has lost quality.

If the date passes during home storage, a refrigerated product will be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor, or change in color or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. Spoiled foods should not be eaten.

The challenge when it comes to food safety is that pathogenic bacteria and viruses are not like spoilage microorganisms. They do not affect the flavor or odor of a food. That is why they are such a problem. If they affected food the same way that spoilage microorganisms do, then we would not eat that food.

No type of date or code indicates the safety of a food. When it comes to food safety, it is the conditions in which a food is handled, not a date on a package, that will determine whether a food can cause foodborne illness.

Therefore, it is critical to store perishable foods like meats, poultry, dairy products, cut fruits and vegetables, and leftovers at 41 degrees or lower in the refrigerator. All meats, poultry, and eggs should be cooked to the correct internal temperature. Hot and cold foods at potlucks or family gatherings is also at risk to become unsafe if left at room temperature too long. Check out our website coshocton.osu.edu for more information about storage time for refrigerated foods and other food safety tips.

Many 2022 OSU Extension programming dates have been set for several nutrition, food safety, and food preservation programs. And remember that free individual financial coaching is available. We will work together to create a financial plan that sets you on the path to financial stability. You can find more details about all these programs on our website coshocton.osu.edu.

In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help educate and improve our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!