

Can I still eat that?

How many times have you caught yourself throwing away food from your plate, pantry and refrigerator wondering if it was still safe to eat? Grocery stores and restaurants also throw away a lot of food especially if it doesn't look "just right." These foods may be absolutely safe, as well as tasty, to eat.

According to a [recent report](#) the average American wastes 300 pounds of food each year. That means about a third of the food we intend to eat ends up in a landfill.

One way you can help reduce food waste is to know how long you can safely keep food. Refer to these common "use by" date labels to help ease some of your confusion around what is still safe to eat.

- **Best if used by/before**
Recommended by the US Department of Agriculture. Indicates when a product is at its best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **Sell-by**
Tells the store how long to display the product for sale. This label is for inventory management and is not a food safety date.
- **Use-by**
The last date recommended for the product to be consumed; at peak quality. It is not a safety date except when used on infant formula.
- **Pack date**
Tells when the product was packaged. It is used by manufacturers and retailers to track and rotate inventory.

Source: USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service. [Food Product Dating](#).

Learn more about food waste and safety issues by checking out [furtherwithfood.org](https://www.furtherwithfood.org).