



Fact Sheet

DURABLE LIFE INFORMATION ON FOOD PRODUCTS

What is the durable life of a food?

The durable life is the *amount of time* that an unopened product will retain all of its wholesomeness, taste, nutritional value, and any other qualities claimed by the manufacturer, when stored under appropriate conditions. Manufacturers and retailers are responsible for determining the durable life of foods they manufacture and sell. Durable life information is not a guarantee of product safety.

How is durable life information different from a best-before date or a packaged-on date?

Durable life information is declared either on the label of a product or on a poster next to the food and is generally expressed as a *number of days*. A “best-before” date is a different way of showing the durable life of a product. It indicates the *date until which* the unopened product will retain its durable life, and must be accompanied by proper storage instructions. A “packaged-on” date is placed on products when they are packaged at the retail store, and must be accompanied by durable life information.

Do all foods require durable life information?

No. However, best before dates and instructions for proper storage (e.g. “keep refrigerated”) are required on most foods destined for retail sale that have a durable life of 90 days or less after being packaged. Products packaged at the retail store, such as meat, fish or poultry, must be labelled with a “packaged on” date and durable life information (label or poster) *or* with a best before date and proper storage instructions. Fresh fruit and vegetables, donuts and some restaurant and vending machine products are not required to carry either a best before date or durable life information.

What happens to food after the best before date or durable life has expired?

When the best before date or durable life of a food has passed, the food may lose some of its nutritional value, such as vitamin C content. It may also lose some of its flavour, or its texture may change. Your senses of sight, smell and taste and your common sense will tell you whether the quality of the food has decreased. And remember, when in doubt, throw it out!

How is durable life information expressed on a label?

Durable life information is expressed as a number of days. The best before date appears on the label as an abbreviated form of the month and the date, and is accompanied by the words “best before” and “meilleur avant”. If necessary, the year will appear before the month and date. For example, a best before date of June 30, 2000 will appear as “00 JN 30.” In some cases (i.e. food packaged at the retail store), the durable life information may instead appear on a poster next to where the food is being sold. In these cases, the packaging date must appear on the product label. It is expressed as “Packaged on”/ “Empaqueté le” with the date.

For more information on food labelling, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at www.inspection.gc.ca

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