



In Your Hands

Safe Food Handling

Buying and handling safe food--and keeping it safe



The following lists can help you check the safety of the food you buy to ensure the quality and freshness of a food product. If a category gets even one ✓ it's best not to put an item from that category in your shopping basket or on your dinner table. Do not purchase any food item that has a dirty container, missing label, damaged or missing tamper-resistant seal, or is past the expiration date.

Food in Bottles or Jars

- ___ Home-canned (from an unknown source)
- ___ Crooked or loose lid
- ___ "Popped" vacuum seal button on lid
- ___ Cracked or chipped glass
- ___ Dirt under the rim
- ___ Damaged or missing tamper-resistant seal

Food in Cans

- ___ Buckled or pinched tops and bottoms
- ___ Rust that can't be rubbed off or makes holes in can
- ___ Swollen or bulging ends
- ___ Holes or sharp dents
- ___ Leaking (or looks like it has leaked)
- ___ Crushed under the rim at either end
- ___ Ends that give or flip and bulge on the other end when pushed

Food in Cardboard (cereal and pasta)

- ___ Signs of insects (chewed areas, holes, droppings)
- ___ Torn or missing inner packaging

Refrigerated Foods

- ___ Warm (not refrigerator temperature)
- ___ "Off" odor, mold, odd appearance (spoilage)

Frozen Foods

- ___ Evidence of thawing (peas stuck together in a lump)
- ___ Leaking bags or containers (temperature too warm)

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- ___ Bruises
- ___ Too soft



Selecting, Handling, and Storing Your Food

Check the dates on foods

- ⌚ A **"Sell-By"** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- ⌚ A **"Best if Used By (or Before)"** date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- ⌚ A **"Use-By"** date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- ⌚ **"Closed"** or **"coded dates"** are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

Cold facts about transporting and storing your food



- * Take food straight home after grocery shopping.
- * Use coolers or insulated bags if travel time from store to home is longer than one hour or if the temperature is above 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- * When you get home, immediately refrigerate or freeze perishable items. Put new items in the back to use older items first.
- * Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer before you put your groceries away. The refrigerator temperature should be 40 ° F or lower and the freezer should be 0 ° F or lower.

Where to store fresh foods



- 🔑 Store fresh fruits and vegetables in the crisper drawer in the refrigerator. It is designed to keep them moist.
- 🔑 Most vegetables are best kept in the refrigerator. Exceptions include potatoes, onions, squashes and eggplant which should be stored in a cool dry place.
- 🔑 Store eggs in their original carton in the main part of the refrigerator and not on the inside of the door.
- 🔑 Fresh meat, cold cuts and cheese should be stored in the coldest part of the refrigerator which is usually on the bottom shelf. Store raw meats separately so juices do not come in contact with ready-to-eat foods.
- 🔑 All dairy foods should be stored in the refrigerator. Milk should not be placed in the door.

UVM Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program helps limited resource families, their children and pregnant women learn to shop smarter, eat healthier, and save money. For more information, please contact: (802) 656-2311 or 1-877-337-5826 (toll-free in Vt.) efnep@uvm.edu

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