

# Food safety of expired products and products past their best before dates

## Best before versus expiration dates

- **Best before dates** are not indicators of food safety, neither before nor after the date.
- You can buy and eat foods after the best before date has passed. However, after this date has passed, the food may lose some of its freshness, flavour, and nutritional value. Its texture may have also changed. For example, vitamin C content in juice may decrease after the best before date.
- Best before dates apply to unopened products only. Once opened, the food's shelf life may change.
- An **expiration date** is not the same as a **best before date**. Expiration dates are required only on certain foods that have strict compositional and nutritional specifications which might not be met after the expiration date.

Expiration dates must be used on the following products:

- formulated liquid diets (nutritionally complete diets for people using oral or tube feeding methods)
- foods represented for use in a very low-energy diet (foods sold only by a pharmacist and only with a written order from a physician)
- meal replacements (formulated food that, by itself, can replace one or more daily meals)
- nutritional supplements (food sold or represented as a supplement to a diet that may be inadequate in energy and essential nutrients)
- human milk substitutes (infant formula)
- After the expiration date, the food may not have the same nutrient content as declared on the label.
- Food should not be bought, sold or eaten if the expiration date has passed. It should be discarded.

## What to do if you see a product for sale that is past its expiration date

If you see foods being sold past their expiration date there are different actions you can take:

1. You can report a concern to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. This allows an inspector to begin a [food safety investigation](#). This process requires filling out an online form that can be accessed [here](#).
2. You can also file an [Incident response](#) against any food you see within your local store that poses a risk to public health. Retailers are responsible for selling and distributing safe food and have key roles and responsibilities in taking appropriate action, such as a food recall, if unsafe food has reached the marketplace. To learn more about what can be done by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, please see the [Standard Regulatory Response Process](#).
3. If you see that a product is expired or the best before date has passed in your local store, you can call the phone number on the product and tell the company that their expired/outdated product is being sold in that specific store. The product company will then reach out to the store with follow-up actions. Often, the product company will replace the expired or outdated products with new items at no additional cost to the retailer.