HOME

13 Foods You Should Think Twice About Eating After Their Expiration Date—Some Can Make You Seriously Sick

By bestfolkmedicine · 28/10/2026 · 12 min read



You open your refrigerator, grab a container of yogurt, a package of deli meat, or a bag of salad, and notice something unsettling.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(122); });

The date on the package has already passed.

Do you throw it away immediately, or do you give it a quick sniff and decide it’s probably fine?

Millions of people face this everyday dilemma, and the answer is not always as simple as it seems.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(130); });
Some foods remain safe well beyond their printed quality dates when stored correctly. Others can become dangerous surprisingly quickly, even when they look, smell, and taste completely normal.

And the most concerning part?

Some bacteria responsible for serious foodborne illnesses produce no obvious warning signs.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(131); });
Understanding which foods require extra caution—and what expiration dates actually mean—could help protect your household from preventable food poisoning.

The Truth About Expiration Dates That Most People Don’t Know

Before discussing specific foods, it is important to understand a major misconception.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(132); });
In the United States, most dates printed on food packaging are not federally regulated safety deadlines.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, manufacturers generally use these dates to communicate when a product is expected to maintain its best quality.

Common labels include:

Best If Used By: Indicates when a food is expected to have its best flavor, freshness, or quality. It is generally not a safety deadline.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(133); });
Sell By: Helps retailers manage inventory and decide how long products should remain on display.

Use By: Usually indicates the manufacturer’s recommended date for peak quality in the United States. Infant formula is a major exception because its use-by date must be followed.

Freeze By: Suggests when a product should be frozen to preserve quality.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(134); });
These labels can create confusion because storage temperature, packaging, handling, and whether the food has been opened all influence how long it remains safe.

Importantly, labeling rules differ internationally. In the United Kingdom and European Union, for example, a use-by date on highly perishable foods is a food-safety deadline and must be respected.

A food's printed date should therefore be interpreted alongside local labeling rules and safe-storage guidance.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(135); });

13 Foods That Deserve Extra Caution After Their Expiration Date

1. Infant Formula

When it comes to infant formula, expiration dates are not optional.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration requires infant formula to carry a use-by date.

Manufacturers must demonstrate that the product maintains appropriate nutritional quality through that date when stored according to instructions.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(136); });
Using formula after its use-by date may compromise the nutritional reliability of a product that infants depend on for growth and development.

Safety recommendation: Never use infant formula after its printed use-by date, even if the container appears perfectly normal.

2. Deli Meats and Cold Cuts

Sliced turkey, ham, chicken, and other deli meats are convenient, but they can also present serious food-safety risks.

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One concern is Listeria monocytogenes, a bacterium capable of growing at refrigerator temperatures.

Unlike many microorganisms, Listeria can continue multiplying in cold environments.

This makes ready-to-eat refrigerated meats particularly important to handle correctly.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(138); });
Pregnant women, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems face a greater risk of severe listeriosis.

Safety recommendation: Refrigerate deli meats promptly. Once opened or sliced at the deli counter, use them within approximately three to five days. Unopened commercially packaged lunch meats generally have a refrigerated storage window of up to two weeks, subject to labeling and handling instructions.

3. Soft Cheeses

Brie, ricotta, queso fresco, and other soft cheeses have higher moisture levels than many hard cheeses.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(139); });
That moisture can make them more vulnerable to microbial contamination and spoilage.

Certain soft cheeses have been associated with Listeria infections, particularly products made with unpasteurized milk.

Although pasteurization reduces risk, contamination can still occur during processing or handling.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(140); });
Soft cheese contaminated with unwanted mold should generally be discarded rather than trimmed.

Safety recommendation: Follow the package’s storage instructions, respect applicable use-by dates, and discard soft cheeses showing unexpected mold, sliminess, or other signs of spoilage.

Pregnant women and other high-risk individuals should be especially careful about choosing pasteurized products and following current food-safety guidance.

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4. Raw Fish and Sushi

Fresh fish is highly perishable.

Seafood can contain bacteria, parasites, and other hazards that are not necessarily detectable through smell or appearance.

Raw fish used in sushi or sashimi requires particularly careful handling because it is eaten without a cooking step that would normally reduce certain microbial risks.

Refrigeration slows spoilage but does not make seafood indefinitely safe.

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Safety recommendation: Follow the supplier's handling instructions and keep fish refrigerated at 40°F (4°C) or below. Many fresh fish products should be cooked or frozen within one to three days, depending on the type.

Avoid eating raw seafood if its storage history is uncertain.

5. Raw Chicken

Chicken is one of the foods that deserves the most careful handling in a home kitchen.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(143); });
Raw poultry can carry bacteria such as Salmonella and Campylobacter.

These organisms can cause diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, and other symptoms of foodborne illness.

Raw chicken may appear fresh even when harmful bacteria are present.

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Improper storage gives bacteria additional opportunities to multiply.

Safety recommendation: Store fresh raw chicken in the refrigerator for only one to two days before cooking or freezing.

Cook poultry to an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C), measured with a food thermometer.

Do not wash raw chicken, because splashing water can spread bacteria around the kitchen.

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6. Raw Oysters and Shellfish

Raw oysters may look like a luxurious delicacy, but they can carry significant foodborne risks.

Oysters filter large amounts of water and may accumulate microorganisms, including Vibrio bacteria.

Some Vibrio infections can cause severe illness, particularly in people with liver disease or compromised immune function.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(146); });
Importantly, oysters can contain harmful bacteria even when they are fresh and within their labeled dates.

Safety recommendation: Avoid raw oysters when their storage history is uncertain, and cook shellfish thoroughly.

People at increased risk of severe infection should avoid raw or undercooked oysters altogether.

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7. Eggs

Eggs are another food where the printed date can be misleading.

In the United States, the sell-by date does not necessarily indicate when eggs become unsafe.

Properly refrigerated shell eggs can generally be stored for three to five weeks.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(148); });
However, eggs may carry Salmonella even when they appear normal.

Cracked shells can also increase contamination risk.

Safety recommendation: Keep eggs refrigerated, discard cracked eggs, and cook them thoroughly when serving higher-risk individuals.

Always discard eggs affected by an official recall, regardless of their expiration date.

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8. Raw Ground Beef

Ground beef requires more careful storage than many people realize.

During grinding, bacteria originally present on meat surfaces can become distributed throughout the product.

This increases the importance of proper cooking.

Ground beef can harbor pathogens such as E. coli and Salmonella.

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And unlike some visible signs of ordinary spoilage, these microorganisms may not change the meat's smell or appearance.

Safety recommendation: Cook or freeze raw ground beef within one to two days of refrigeration.

Cook ground beef to an internal temperature of 160°F (71°C).

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(151); });
Discard meat that has been stored improperly, even if it still appears fresh.

9. Fresh Berries

Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries are nutrient-rich foods, but they are also highly perishable.

Their delicate skins and high moisture content make them susceptible to mold and spoilage.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(152); });
Soft fruit can deteriorate quickly, especially when moisture accumulates inside its packaging.

Mold can spread beyond the visibly affected area.

Safety recommendation: Refrigerate berries promptly, remove visibly spoiled fruit, and inspect the remaining berries carefully. If mold is widespread, the fruit is leaking, or the package is heavily spoiled, discard the batch.

Do not rely solely on a printed quality date to determine whether fresh berries are safe.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(153); });

10. Bagged Salads and Leafy Greens

Prewashed spinach, lettuce, arugula, and mixed salad greens are convenient foods that many people eat without further cooking.

However, leafy greens have been implicated in outbreaks involving pathogens such as E. coli, Salmonella, and Listeria.

Because these vegetables are often consumed raw, there may be no heat treatment before eating.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(154); });
Excess moisture inside bags can also encourage deterioration.

Safety recommendation: Keep packaged greens refrigerated, respect safety-related labeling and storage instructions, and discard bags containing slimy leaves, widespread decay, or unpleasant odors.

Remember that harmful bacteria may be present even without visible spoilage.

11. Unpasteurized Juice

Freshly squeezed juice may seem healthier because it is minimally processed.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(155); });
But unpasteurized juice can contain microorganisms from raw fruit, equipment, or handling.

Potential pathogens include E. coli and Salmonella.

Pasteurization is designed to reduce these risks.

An attractive appearance or fresh flavor does not guarantee that an untreated juice is safe.

Safety recommendation: Follow refrigeration and use-by instructions carefully.

Children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems should choose pasteurized juices rather than unpasteurized products.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(156); });

12. Raw Sprouts

Alfalfa, clover, radish, and bean sprouts are often promoted as nutritious additions to salads and sandwiches.

But sprouts are grown in warm, humid conditions that also favor bacterial growth.

If seeds become contaminated, bacteria may multiply during sprouting.

Even homegrown sprouts can carry foodborne pathogens.

Safety recommendation: Refrigerate sprouts, respect applicable use-by dates, and discard deteriorating packages.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(157); });
People at high risk of foodborne illness should avoid raw sprouts and choose thoroughly cooked alternatives.

13. Opened Creamy Dressings and Refrigerated Dips

Mayonnaise-based salads, dairy dips, creamy dressings, and similar refrigerated foods can become unsafe when improperly stored.

However, not all creamy condiments have the same risk.

Commercial mayonnaise is usually formulated with acidity that helps limit bacterial growth. It is not equivalent to homemade mayonnaise made with raw eggs or to a perishable mixed salad.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(158); });
The greater concern often involves contamination, prolonged storage, and temperature abuse after opening.

Safety recommendation: Follow the manufacturer’s refrigeration and after-opening instructions.

Discard products showing spoilage and do not use a condiment simply because it smells acceptable if it has been left unrefrigerated for an unsafe period.

The Dangerous Myth: If It Smells Fine, It Must Be Safe

One of the most common food-safety mistakes is relying entirely on smell.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(159); });
Unfortunately, this method is unreliable.

Bacteria responsible for food poisoning do not always produce the odors, discoloration, or texture changes associated with spoilage.

A piece of contaminated chicken may appear fresh.

A recalled package of salad might look completely normal.

And improperly handled deli meat may have no obvious warning signs.

Spoilage bacteria and disease-causing bacteria are not necessarily the same organisms.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(160); });
A normal smell does not prove that food is safe to eat.

Which Foods Can Sometimes Be Safe After Their Best-Before Date?

Not every expired-looking product belongs in the trash.

Some shelf-stable foods may remain suitable after their quality dates if packaging is intact and storage conditions have been appropriate.

Examples include dried pasta, dry rice, unopened shelf-stable canned foods, honey, vinegar, and some dry cereals.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(161); });
Their flavor, texture, or nutritional quality may gradually decline over time.

However, this does not mean every product is safe indefinitely.

Never consume food from bulging, leaking, badly rusted, or severely damaged cans.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(162); });
And always follow safety-based use-by dates, recall notices, and appropriate storage requirements.

How Long Can Common Foods Stay in the Refrigerator?

These are general U.S. cold-storage recommendations for properly refrigerated foods at 40°F (4°C) or below.

Food	Recommended refrigerator storage
Raw chicken or turkey	1–2 days
Raw ground beef	1–2 days
Fresh beef steaks	3–5 days
Fresh fatty fish	1–3 days
Deli meats, opened	3–5 days
Raw eggs in shell	3–5 weeks
Hard-boiled eggs	1 week
Cooked leftovers	3–4 days
Soups and stews	3–4 days

These periods are not guarantees. They assume proper storage and handling, and any applicable safety-related use-by date takes precedence.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(163); });

7 Food-Safety Habits That Could Protect Your Family

Food poisoning prevention often comes down to a handful of consistent habits.

1. Keep your refrigerator at 40°F (4°C) or below. Use a refrigerator thermometer rather than guessing.
2. Refrigerate perishable foods promptly. Generally, avoid leaving them at room temperature for more than two hours, or one hour when temperatures exceed 90°F (32°C).
3. Store raw meat on the bottom shelf. This helps prevent juices from dripping onto ready-to-eat foods.

4. Use separate cutting boards. Keep raw meat and poultry away from fresh produce.
5. Cook food to safe internal temperatures. A food thermometer is more reliable than judging color alone.
6. Check food recall announcements. Recalled food should not be eaten even when it looks fresh.
7. Freeze foods before they exceed recommended storage periods. Freezing promptly can help preserve food and reduce waste.

Who Faces the Greatest Risk From Foodborne Illness?

Although anyone can develop food poisoning, certain individuals are more likely to experience serious complications.

These include young children, pregnant women, adults aged 65 and older, and people with weakened immune systems.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(164); });
Individuals with certain chronic illnesses may also be more vulnerable to specific foodborne pathogens.

For these groups, extra care with raw seafood, unpasteurized products, deli meats, soft cheeses, and raw sprouts is particularly important.

When Should You Seek Medical Attention?

Most mild cases of food poisoning resolve without serious complications, but some require medical care.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(165); });
Seek medical advice if symptoms include bloody diarrhea, persistent high fever, severe abdominal pain, repeated vomiting that prevents fluid intake, or signs of dehydration.

Pregnant women, older adults, young children, and immunocompromised individuals should seek medical advice promptly when foodborne illness is suspected.

Symptoms such as difficulty breathing, severe weakness, confusion, or significant dehydration require urgent evaluation.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(166); });

The Bottom Line

Expiration dates can be confusing, and misunderstanding them can lead to two very different problems.

On one hand, perfectly usable food may be thrown away simply because it has passed a quality date.

On the other, highly perishable foods can become unsafe when stored too long or handled incorrectly.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(167); });
The key is knowing the difference.

Not every food becomes dangerous the day its printed date passes—but some foods can be dangerous even before that date.

Pay particular attention to raw meat, seafood, ready-to-eat refrigerated products, infant formula, and foods involved in recalls.

Use proper refrigeration, follow safe-storage recommendations, and never assume that appearance or smell alone can guarantee safety.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(168); });
A little food-safety knowledge can help protect your health, reduce unnecessary waste, and prevent costly mistakes in the kitchen.

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