

# Shelf Life Advice



## 2010 ELECTRONIC MEDIA KIT

***[ShelfLifeAdvice.com](http://ShelfLifeAdvice.com) is a free website with comprehensive shelf life and storage information on hundreds of foods, with data from university, government, and other reliable sources.***

# ShelfLifeAdvice



## Media Kit Contents

ShelfLifeAdvice.com Fact Sheet-----	3
ShelfLifeAdvice.com Press Release-----	4
In-Depth Explanation of Survey Results-----	6
The Birth of ShelfLifeAdvice.com-----	10
Feature Article: What is the best way to clean fresh fruits and vegetables?-----	12
Feature Article: Can I remove a moldy part and eat the rest?-----	13
ShelfLifeAdvice.com Stock Photos-----	14
ShelfLifeAdvice.com Board of Advisors-----	15



## ShelfLifeAdvice.com Fact Sheet

- Launch Date: January 1, 2010
- Size of Audience: 50,000 visitors
- Motto: Avoid waste...Save money...Stay green
- Sources: All data comes from credible food scientists, universities and government sources

### About Shelf Life Advice

- ShelfLifeAdvice.com is a free food-reference website dedicated to educating consumers about safe storage time frames for hundreds of food products.
- Provides specific guidelines for how long consumers can keep their unopened and opened foods via expiration tables, articles, answers to FAQs, and tips to save money by reducing waste.
- Provides information on how to handle (store, wrap, clean and cook) hundreds of foods.
- Covers food safety issues in the news—such as product recalls due to contamination and new discoveries.
- Shelf Life Advice offers answers to FAQs on topics such as:
  - [How long can I keep refrigerated leftovers?](#)
  - [Will the refrigerator ruin bananas?](#)
  - [Is it true that dropped food picked up within 5 seconds doesn't have time to collect germs?](#)
- Here are just a few general tips Shelf Life Advice offers consumers:
  - [Saving money at the supermarket](#)
  - [Techniques for cleaning the refrigerator](#)
  - [The meanings and implications of product dates used on food packaging](#)



July 14, 2010

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Americans Wasting Billions Tossing Food Mistakenly Believed to be Spoiled**

CHICAGO & ORLANDO, Fla.—Today, ShelfLifeAdvice.com and Harris Interactive released a surprising new study revealing that 76 percent of U.S. consumers mistakenly believe certain foods are unsafe to eat after the date printed on the packaging has passed.

In fact, food scientists agree that most foods, if stored properly, can be safely consumed for days or even weeks past the package date.

“The dates on food packages are very conservative...if the product was stored properly it should last well beyond the date on the package,” said Joe Regenstein, Ph.D, professor of food science at Cornell University and member of the ShelfLifeAdvice.com Board of Advisors.

The survey, whose results have just been released today, was conducted online by Harris Interactive in March for ShelfLifeAdvice.com, a website that provides shelf-life data on hundreds of food products plus storage and handling tips that help consumers maximize longevity, safety and freshness of food.

The Harris Interactive study asked 2,482 American adults which, if any, of 10 refrigerated food products were considered unsafe to eat past the printed package date. Almost half of the respondents believed eggs were one of those products.

“‘Sell-by’ dates anticipate consumption after the printed date. When eggs are stored in the refrigerator, they should last at least 3-5 weeks after the ‘sell-by’ date,” explained Regenstein.

Milk was even more misunderstood than eggs, with 61 percent of respondents mistakenly believing the printed date is the final date milk can safely be consumed.

“Generally, milk has no ‘off flavor’ up to five days after the printed date passes. When off flavors can be detected, the off flavors are produced by [harmless] bacteria, so even this milk could be consumed without making one sick,” said Clair Hicks, Ph.D, professor of food science at the University of Kentucky and member of the ShelfLifeAdvice.com Board of Advisors.

Based on the Harris Interactive study, ShelfLifeAdvice.com estimates that if 61 percent of Americans needlessly discard just a quarter gallon of milk each month, they would be

# ShelfLifeAdvice



wasting over \$700 million a year. Combining this figure with the other foods in the survey, ShelfLifeAdvice.com estimates that billions are wasted by American households every year.

According to a University of Arizona study funded by the USDA, Americans throw away more than 40 percent—approximately 29 million tons—of all the food we produce each year. This has a significant environmental and economic impact.

ShelfLifeAdvice.com's mission is to help consumers avoid waste by providing detailed information about the real shelf life of opened and unopened food products, thereby helping consumers save money and preserve the environment.

For more detailed information about the survey results, methodology including weighting variables, and additional facts about food shelf life, visit <http://shelflifeadvice.com/media>.

***[ShelfLifeAdvice.com](http://shelflifeadvice.com) is a free website with comprehensive shelf-life and storage information on hundreds of foods, with data from university, government, and other reliable sources.***

## **Survey Methodology**

*This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of ShelfLifeAdvice.com from March 8-10, 2010 among 2,482 adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.*

*Harris Interactive is one of the world's leading custom market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight. Known widely for the Harris Poll and for pioneering innovative research methodologies, Harris offers expertise in a wide range of industries including healthcare, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer package goods. Serving clients in over 215 countries and territories through our North American, European, and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms, Harris specializes in delivering research solutions that help us – and our clients – stay ahead of what's next. For more information, please visit [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).*

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## DO FOOD PRODUCT DATES MAKE CONSUMERS SAFER OR JUST POORER?

### Survey Shows These Dates Are Usually Misinterpreted. Why?

By Ethel Tiersky, ShelfLifeAdvice.com editor

Food product dates encourage food waste—that's what the creators of ShelfLifeAdvice.com hypothesized. To find out if they were right, they hired Harris Interactive to conduct a survey to test the theory.

More than 2,000 American adults responded to the following question about 10 food products: "To the best of your knowledge, which of the following refrigerated food products, if any, would be considered unsafe to consume once the date printed on the packaging has passed?" The correct answer? If properly handled, NONE of the products listed would cause illness if used shortly after the so-called "expiration" date. Yet, 76% of respondents checked at least one. Since most people don't consume food they believe is unsafe to eat, the survey strongly suggests that most Americans throw out a lot of perfectly good food because the date on the package has passed, and they fear the product will make them sick.

The five products most often checked as being unsafe after the printed date were: milk—61% of respondents; cottage cheese—57%, mayonnaise—54%, yogurt—50%, and eggs—45%. The other five products were: cheddar cheese (29%), orange juice (29%), margarine (19%), olives (15%) and mustard (12%).

In these tough economic times, no one wants to waste food or money. Still, news about recalls of contaminated products keeps food-borne illness in people's minds. Consumers want to avoid getting sick, so they probably discard all those products they think are unsafe to eat. But consider the facts about the products mentioned above:

**Milk:** if properly refrigerated will remain safe, nutritious, and tasty for about a week after the "sell-by" date and will probably be safe to drink longer than that, though, with time, there's a decline in nutritional value and taste.

**Cottage cheese:** is no longer a fragile product, especially the commercial pasteurized varieties with protective packaging and preservatives that are mold inhibitors. Dean's says its cottage cheese lasts for 10-14 days after the date on the carton (or 10-14 days after opening if this period ends before the printed date).

**Store-bought mayonnaise:** is acidic and contains preservatives, so it's well protected from contamination. Mayonnaise is often blamed for illnesses that are actually caused by the products it's mixed with. Unopened, refrigerated Kraft mayonnaise can be kept

# ShelfLifeAdvice



for 30 days after its expiration date or 3-4 months after opening, the company told ShelfLifeAdvice.com.

**Yogurt:** will remain good 7-10 days after its “sell-by” date. If kept longer, it will develop a stronger taste and the bacterial cultures (which act as preservatives) will start to die off.

**Eggs:** properly refrigerated, should last at least 3- 5 weeks after the “sell-by” date, according to Professor Joe Regenstein, a food scientist at Cornell University. Many consumers don’t know this and discard eggs when they reach the “sell-by” date.

Some respondents checked these products in the survey: cheddar cheese (29%), orange juice (29%), margarine (19%), olives (15%) and mustard (12%). All remain safe to consume even after they are open and past the “sell-by” or “use-by” date (assuming proper handling). Among the survey respondents, women did 8% better than men, older people did better than younger ones, and married folks surpassed singles. But overall, the answers showed widespread misunderstanding of product dating.

## What don’t consumers understand?

Two-thirds of the participants in the survey assumed “use-by” dates are about safety when they’re actually about quality (taste, texture, appearance, odor, and maintenance of nutritional values stated on the packaging). The “use-by” (or “best if used by”) date indicates the last day that the item is at its best. “Use-by” dates refer to the UNOPENED product. Consumers who don’t realize that may keep some opened products (salad dressings, for example) long past the time when they’re at their best.

The decline in quality is generally gradual and, at first, imperceptible. As time goes on, the consumer can usually tell (by the product’s appearance, scent, and/or texture) whether or not it is still of good enough quality to be enjoyable.

A “sell-by” date tells the store manager when the product should be taken off the shelf, so shoppers should look for products that have not reached that date. However, “sell-by” is not a safety date either. It usually means that the product will remain of top quality for at least a few days past that date.

Regenstein also points out that the “use-by” dates on food packages are very conservative and assume a certain amount of product abuse (mishandling). If properly handled, most foods will outlive the expiration dates at least for a short time.

## Consumers would worry less and waste less if more were aware of these facts:

- In general, properly refrigerated foods don’t cause illness because most harmful bacteria don’t grow in cold environments, or they grow slowly. However, there are some pathogens to beware of. For example, the pathogen *Listeria* can grow in the refrigerator

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and can be dangerous for pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems. Vegetables can develop pathogens that cause botulism if wrapped in an airtight manner. For more information on these dangers, see “FAQs on Bacteria” on ShelfLifeAdvice.com.

- “Spoilage” bacteria (the ones that make food taste bad, become slimy or discolored, or smell bad) grow faster than the types of the bacteria that cause illness, explains University of Illinois food scientist Susan Brewer, Ph.D. Therefore, the “yuck” factor forces most people to discard old items before it becomes a health risk.
- To some extent, consumers can trust their senses. If the product looks, smells, and feels okay (isn’t slimy), it’s probably okay to eat for at least 4-7 days after its expiration date.
- Pathogens don’t grow on frozen food. If it was safe to eat when it went into the freezer, it will remain safe while frozen no matter how long. The dates on frozen food are quality dates only.
- Shelf-stable dry products (containing no moisture or fat) may last long past the “use-by” date.
- Most food-borne illness is not caused by food that’s past its “use-by” date. It is caused by mishandling of food somewhere along the food chain. About one-quarter of the American population suffers from a food-borne illness every year. About 31% of all food contamination originates in the home. But most isn’t from “old” food. Rather, it’s from mistakes such as: not washing hands well before handling food, keeping food at the wrong temperature, cross-contamination (bringing food that’s served uncooked in contact with raw, contaminated items), and not washing raw poultry, fruits, or vegetables well. Good kitchen hygiene can do much to keep consumers healthy.

The key to prolonging shelf life, according to Regenstein, is keeping foods stored properly. Frozen food should be properly wrapped, refrigerators need to be properly set, and most other products stored should in the coolest, driest place in the kitchen/pantry.

According to a University of Arizona study funded by the USDA, Americans throw away more than 40 percent—approximately 29 million tons—of all the food the country produces for domestic sale and consumption, creating both an environmental and an economic problem. There is waste all along the food chain, but by far the most occurs in homes, restaurants, schools, and other eating places. On average, American households waste 14 percent of their food purchases.

ShelfLifeAdvice.com estimates that if 61% of Americans (the percentage of respondents that thought milk was spoiled when it reached the date on the carton) needlessly discard a quarter of a gallon of milk each month, they would be wasting over \$700 million a year. Combining this figure with all the other foods in the survey,



# ShelfLifeAdvice



ShelfLifeAdvice.com estimates that billions are wasted every year by American households discarding good food.

Looking for answers to their questions about food shelf life and care, more than 50,000 visitors have come to ShelfLifeAdvice.com since it launched in January, 2010. The site provides shelf life data on hundreds of products (unopened and opened). Product Q/As, FAQs, and Tips provide storage and handling information for maximum longevity, safety, and freshness. The information on ShelfLifeAdvice.com, its founders believe, will help consumers keep food safer and longer, save money, and contribute to the creation of a “greener” world.

## **Survey Methodology**

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*Harris Interactive is one of the world's leading custom market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight. Known widely for the Harris Poll and for pioneering innovative research methodologies, Harris offers expertise in a wide range of industries including healthcare, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer package goods. Serving clients in over 215 countries and territories through our North American, European, and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms, Harris specializes in delivering research solutions that help us – and our clients – stay ahead of what's next. For more information, please visit [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).*

## **Sources:**

**<http://ShelfLifeAdvice.com>:**

- [It Says “Use by Tomorrow,” but You Don’t Have To](#)
- [FAQs on Food Product Dating](#)
- [“Is It Spoiled?” When in Doubt, Check It Out](#)
- [FAQs on Bacteria](#)
- [FAQs on Mold](#)

**Clemson University Extension** “Safe Handling of Dairy Products”

[http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/food\\_safety/hgic3510.html](http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/food_safety/hgic3510.html)

**Environmental Protection Agency** “Basic Information about Food Waste”

<http://www.epa.gov/osw/consERVE/materials/organics/food/fd-basic.htm>

**Soundvision.com** “Statistics on poverty & food wastage in America”

<http://www.soundvision.com/Info/poor/statistics.asp>



## Retired Teacher Becomes Internet Maven with New Website about Food Safety

- Retired teacher—with son's help—creates food storage website-attracts 50,000 visitors in just five months
- Saves marriage from arguments about food expiration
- Learns about working from home in the global workplace
- Finds that working her way through retirement keeps her young

### The Birth of ShelfLifeAdvice.com

When retiree Ethel Tiersky asked for a suggestion on how to fill up her newly-empty days, her friend responded, "reinvent yourself."

Tiersky spent 33 years as an English professor and has authored many popular books used for teaching English. She's also a wife and mother and in the latter role, often found herself in conflict with her spouse about one key issue in the household: when food in the refrigerator needed to be discarded. "When in doubt, throw it out!" was her mantra, while her spouse would regularly bemoan the amount of "perfectly good food" wasted just because its sell-by or use-by date had arrived.

So, as her first post-retirement project, hoping to finally prove her husband wrong, she gave herself a freelance writing assignment: to research and write a magazine article revealing the "truth" of packaged food expiration dates.

To her surprise, Tiersky quickly discovered her assumptions were inaccurate. Through research with food scientists, she discovered that most foods are in fact safe to eat past the dates printed on the packages.

Tiersky was in the early stages of research for her article when she had lunch with her son, Howard, the CEO of the digital agency Moving Interactive (which does websites for such brands as Universal Studios and Reader's Digest). He was fascinated by the outcome of her research with food scientists. He then encouraged his mother to create a reference web site to help people save money and avoid wasting, as his father had so often described it, "perfectly good food." Her son also offered the technical help of his web development team, based in Lima, Peru, to get the site off the ground.

Getting the site up and running was a long-distance, collaborative accomplishment. Tiersky got well-acquainted with many people that, to this day, she's never met. The Moving Interactive technical staff in Lima handled site development, a food scientist and professor at the University of Illinois in Champaign checked facts, and several remote researchers and writers worked on content development. This was a new, exciting way to work for a teacher who was mostly used to face-to-face encounters.

# ShelfLifeAdvice



Working on ShelfLifeAdvice.com provided a wonderful outlet for a retired woman not really ready to retire. It's also helped thousands of others learn the truth about food expiration and even improved her marriage. No longer does Tiersky throw out eggs and milk when they reach their sell-by dates. She has learned that food doesn't instantly turn into poison when its expiration date arrives. Tiersky now knows that these dates are usually about the *quality* of products, not their *safety* or lack of it. Peace reigns in the Tiersky household, and the garbage carries away much less edible food.

Now that she's a website writer and editor, Tiersky feels reinvented. She's thrilled with her new-found computer ease and her food safety expertise. "Learning something new is rejuvenating," she says. "I feel years younger, and I'm truly a different person."



## Feature article

### What is the best way to clean fresh fruits and vegetables?

By Susan Brewer, Ph.D., University of Illinois, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition



All fruits and vegetables should be washed well with water. A scrub brush should also be used on for hard-skinned fruits (for example, apples and cantaloupe) and vegetables with irregular skins (such as squash and potatoes) Following these procedures will get them as clean as commercial washes.

If you want to use something stronger than water alone, add 1 tablespoon of vinegar to 1 gallon of water for clean fruit and vegetable surfaces. Rinse them well under clean running water after treating with the vinegar solution.

Soft-skinned fruits (berries, pears, etc.) can be rinsed or submerged in water. (If submerging, change the water once.) Allow the produce to drip to remove most of the water. Root vegetables especially (potatoes, carrots, beets, and turnips) should be scrubbed with a vegetable brush to remove any soil adhering to the skin. More tender vegetables (for example, lettuce, broccoli, and cauliflower) should be gently cleaned.

Fruits and vegetables should not be washed until right before they are used. Wet surfaces, even in the refrigerator, provide a good surface for mold growth. Mold will spoil the fruit or vegetable, and some kinds can make both fruits and vegetables unsafe to eat if they produce mycotoxins, (chemicals that can permeate the tissue of fruits and vegetables and are harmful to human health).

Fruits and vegetables should be washed even if they are going to be peeled because bacteria from the peel can contaminate the flesh during the peeling process. If they are to be peeled and then consumed raw, they should be rinsed, peeled, and then rinsed again.

Because fruits are very acidic, most bacteria that can cause illness won't grow on them; however they can serve as "carriers" of disease-causing illness bacteria like E. coli. Peeled vegetables (for instance, potatoes and beets) should be cooked right after they are peeled. If they are to be consumed raw, they should be loosely covered with plastic film and refrigerated. All vegetables should be cleaned immediately before consuming or cooking.



## Feature article

### Can I remove a moldy part from food and eat the rest?

By Susan Brewer, Ph.D., University of Illinois, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition



With a very few exceptions, moldy food should be discarded. Here are some guidelines for specific food groups:

- Hard salami: the mold on the surface can be scrubbed or trimmed off, and the product can be used.
- Cheeses with mold as part of the process of making them (Roquefort, Stilton, Gorgonzola, Blue, Brie, Camembert) can be trimmed as long as you can trim off at least 1 inch. (However, the moldy flavor may have penetrated the product.) These cheeses are manufactured using mold. Generally, the mold on the surface is the same as what was used to make the cheese (which is safe). Other hard cheeses with mold on them should be discarded. They were not made with mold, they were made by bacterial fermentation. So the mold on the surface could be anything.
- Most soft cheeses (cottage, cream cheese, Neufchatel), crumbled, shredded, and sliced cheeses (all types) should be discarded when they develop mold.
- Hard fruits and vegetables such as bell peppers, carrots and turnips have low water content, so the mold can't penetrate deeply into them. They can be trimmed and used. Cut off at least 1 inch around and below the moldy spot. Take care not to get the knife in the mold itself so as not to cross-contaminate the healthy tissue.
- Soft fruits and vegetables (such as strawberries, peaches, tomatoes, and cucumbers) have a high water content, so the mold can easily penetrate into them. They should be discarded.
- All other foods such as cured meats (hot dogs, bacon), fresh meat and poultry, rice and pasta products, breads and baked goods, legumes, all nuts, milk products (such as yogurt) and jams and jellies should be discarded.

Source:

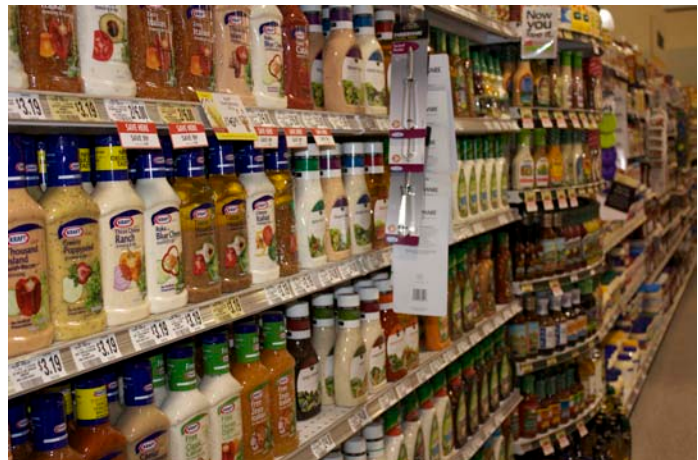
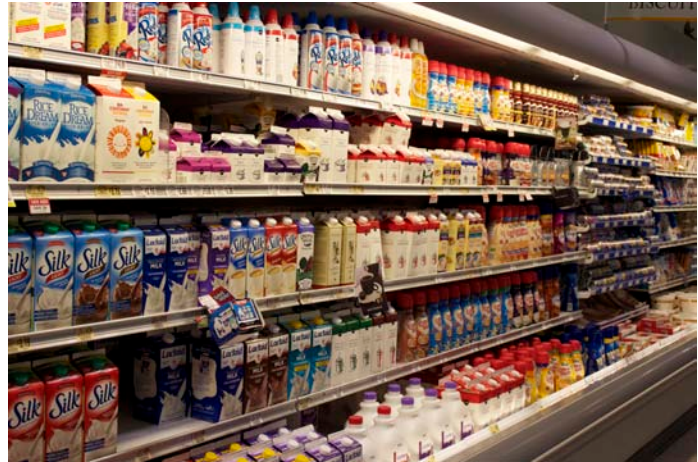
USDA Fact Sheets [“Safe Food Handling / Molds On Food: Are They Dangerous?”](#)

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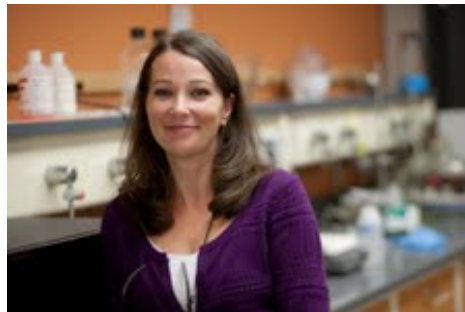
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