

Food Safety Tips for Donating Foods

Food pantries often rely on food donations to help local families in need. When donating to a food pantry, the food items donated should be selected carefully to reduce the risk for foodborne illness. Below are guidelines to follow when donating canned and packaged foods (often called “shelf stable” foods) and fresh produce. Please note that home-baked and home-canned/preserved foods cannot be donated. Some pantries have additional rules and requirements, therefore, it is best to contact them in advance before making a donation.

1. Try to donate foods before the date stamped on the package to assure best quality. Food packages are often dated with one of the terms listed below:

- **“BEST IF USED BY”** – Recommended for best flavor and quality, not for purchase or safety.
- **“SELL-BY”** – Date provided to retailers as the last date the food can be sold.
- **“EXPIRATION DATE”** – The recommended last day the food should be eaten for quality or nutritious reasons.
- **“USE BY”** – Last date this product is recommended to be consumed at the highest quality.

With the exception of infant formula and baby food, the dates on the food packages are an indication of quality, not safety. If they have been handled properly, they are safe to eat after the date on the package.

2. DO NOT DONATE baby food or formula that is past any date listed — no matter what type of date is indicated on the package. This is to make sure that the food or formula is nutritionally sound for a growing infant.

3. Make sure the packages of “shelf stable” foods are in good condition.

- Avoid packages with holes, tears, or signs of pest infestation (e.g., chew marks, urine stains/smell, or droppings present in/on the foods) or signs of water damage.
- Avoid packages with no labels or labels you cannot clearly read.

4. Inspect cans to make sure they are also in good/sound condition.

- Avoid cans that are leaking, bulging, swollen, sharply dented, or have holes in them.
- Avoid cans with no labels, rust stains, or show signs of pest infestation.
- Avoid home canned items.

5. Inspect bottles, jars, and pouches.

- Avoid products that have loose or broken caps/seals, leaking tops, signs of insect infestations, cracks, or chips, etc.
- Avoid products with unusual product separation, appearance of mold, or presence of dirt/grime, etc.

6. Fresh fruits and vegetables can be donated if they are whole, uncut, firm to the touch, have desirable shape, color and texture. Do not donate fresh produce that is bruised, damaged, decayed or molded.

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