2.6: Best Before and Expiry Dates

The best before date (or meilleur avant) as illustrated in Figure 2.5 indicates the anticipated amount of time an unopened food product keeps its freshness, taste, nutritional value, or any other qualities claimed by the company, when stored properly. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2018) indicates that unopened products "should be of high quality until the specified date." As soon as the product is opened, the best before date no longer applies. The best before date must appear on packaged foods that have a shelf life of 90 days or less such as milk, yogurt, and bread. Products still can be purchased or eaten after best before dates as these dates are not related to product safety.

Figure 2.5: Best before dates

Packaged foods that show an expiration date (as illustrated in Figure 2.6) must be consumed before that date or discarded after the expiry date. The expiry date must not be mistaken for the best before date. Expiration dates are not required on all foods. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2018) indicates that foods that have “strict compositional and nutritional specifications” must have expiry dates (e.g., infant formula, meal replacements, nutritional supplements, formulated liquid diets for oral and tube feeding).
Expiration dates and best before dates rely on a consumer's ability to follow instructions concerning proper food storage. You may need to reinforce with clients the importance of keeping “cold food cold and hot food hot” so that bacteria do not grow (Government of Canada, 2014). The Government of Canada (2014) indicates that refrigerator temperatures should be kept at +4° Celsius and freezer temperatures are to be kept at -18° Celsius. Further information about refrigeration and freezer times for safety and quality can be viewed at: https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-food-storage.html

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