

Newsflash

Issue 2022.11

Cutting Board Wisdom

Before you start your holiday cooking and baking, take stock of your cutting boards. For food safety's sake, it might be time to invest in a new one.

Cutting boards with deep scratches should be replaced because bacteria can hide in the grooves, even after washing. And if you rely on only one or two boards, buy a couple of new ones. You need at least three: one that's dedicated to raw meat, one to chop vegetables, and one for cooked meat. It's also nice to have separate boards for fish and poultry. A set of color-coded mats can help you remember which is which.

As for the wood vs. plastic debate, Consumer Report's food-safety experts recommend that you choose cutting boards made out of polypropylene or another dishwasher safe material for raw meat, poultry, and fish. But for produce, baked goods, and cooked meat, it's your choice. If you use a wooden board, wash it by hand in hot soapy water. To remove odors, rub the board with one-half lemon and coarse salt. Rinse, then give your board a little conditioning by rubbing the lemon rind over the board.



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Expired Products: The Dos and Don'ts

In visits to 31 supermarkets in seven states, secret shoppers found 72 food items that were past their sell-by dates. More recently, state attorney generals in several states have taken legal action against a major pharmacy chain after investigators found expired drinks, food, and over-the-counter medications on sale. Expiration dates can alert you to danger, but not all foods carry them. While drugs do, getting rid of them isn't always straightforward.

FOOD AND DRINK

While you can simply toss bad food, the tougher task is identifying what's bad. Here's what to look for:

Do check for product dates. An "expiration" date shows the last date the food should be consumed. A "use by" date indicates the last day the product is likely to be at peak flavor. A "sell by" or "pull" date indicates the last day a product should be sold.

Don't confuse the product's code – a series of letters, numbers, or both used to track foods and, if necessary, recall them – with its use-by date.

Do read the dates on your canned foods. High-acid canned foods, such as tomatoes, can last 12 to 18 months. Low-acid foods (fish, meat, and most vegetables) can last two to five years.

Don't open a can that's bulging, dented, or rusting because it can harbor harmful bacteria.

Do throw away perishable food that has been left unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours. Eat refrigerated, cooked leftovers within four days.

Don't taste food to see if it is bad.

Do throw out items when in doubt.

MEDICATIONS

About a third of the 4 billion prescriptions written each year go unused, according to the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA). And many of those drugs are not properly disposed of. That helps explain why traces of antibiotics, mood stabilizers, hormones, and other drugs have been found in drinking water. If you have unused or expired meds:

Don't flush them in the toilet or toss them down the drain unless the label or product information tells you to.

Do ask your local pharmacist if he or she participates in the drug take-back program developed by NCPA, which sends leftover drugs to medical waste disposal facilities. To find a participating pharmacy near your home, go to www.disposemy meds.org. Or check with your local or state waste management authority about other options.

Don't throw drugs directly in the trash. If a medication collection program isn't available, mix the drugs with cat litter, coffee grounds, or other undesirable substances. That should deter people from rifling through your trash to find them. Put the mixture in a container with a lid or a bag that can be sealed. Remove all personal information, then put the sealed container in the garbage.

American Diabetes Month

RISK FACTORS FOR PREDIABETES AND TYPE 2 DIABETES

Researchers don't fully understand why some people develop prediabetes and type 2 diabetes and others don't. It's clear that certain factors increase the risk, however, including:

- **Weight.** The more fatty tissue you have, the more resistant your cells become to insulin.
- **Inactivity.** The less active you are, the greater your risk. Physical activity helps you control your weight, uses up glucose as energy and makes your cells more sensitive to insulin.
- **Family history.** Your risk increases if a parent or sibling has type 2 diabetes.
- **Race.** Although it's unclear why, people of certain races — including blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and Asian-Americans — are at higher risk.
- **Age.** Your risk increases as you get older. This may be because you tend to exercise less, lose muscle mass and gain weight as you age. But type 2 diabetes is also increasing dramatically among children, adolescents and younger adults.
- **Gestational diabetes.** If you developed gestational diabetes when you were pregnant, your risk of developing prediabetes and type 2 diabetes later increases. If you gave birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds (4 kilograms), you're also at risk of type 2 diabetes.
- **Polycystic ovary syndrome.** For women, having polycystic ovary syndrome — a common condition characterized by irregular menstrual periods, excess hair growth and obesity — increases the risk of diabetes.
- **High blood pressure.** Having blood pressure over 140/90 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) is linked to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes.
- **Abnormal cholesterol and triglyceride levels.** If you have low levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or "good," cholesterol, your risk of type 2 diabetes is higher. Triglycerides are another type of fat carried in the blood. People with high levels of triglycerides have an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Your doctor can let you know what your cholesterol and triglyceride levels are.

PREVENTION IS KEY

- Maintain a healthy weight. If you put on a few pounds, lose them.
- If you are overweight, losing even 10-15 lbs can help prevent the onset of diabetes.
- Be active. Just 30 minutes a day of walking will help prevent diabetes or help control your blood sugar levels if you have diabetes.



Five Tips for Stocking Your Freezer

More and more people are buying in bulk to cut down on their food budgets. And with the holiday season now upon us, we tend to over buy and over cook. Before freezing your purchases and your leftovers, try these tips from Dana Jacobi, author of *"Cook & Freeze: 150 Delicious Dishes to Serve Now and Later"*.

Freeze the right foods. Freezer-friendly foods include beans, blueberries, chicken stock, cooked tomato sauce, corn, green beans, lentils, mashed sweet potatoes, peaches, and sturdy greens like collards, kale and spinach. Fish and seafood, meat, and poultry freeze better raw than when cooked. For best taste and texture, store foods at their peak of freshness, rather than when they're on their way out.

Don't freeze certain items. Skip anything with cream sauce, mayonnaise, or yogurt, which can separate and curdle. Ditto for cooked rice, fresh tomatoes, fried food, lettuce, mushrooms, shelled eggs, and whole potatoes, which lose quality in a freezer. Puree whole berries before freezing to avoid any mushiness.

Do use your space wisely. Use rectangular, freezer-safe plastic containers, and leave a little room for the food to expand. Freeze soups and other liquid-based food in freezer bags and store flat. Keep your freezer at least 75 percent full, which makes it more efficient than one that is half-filled.

Don't get burned. If you're not using containers, prevent freezer burn by double-wrapping food with plastic freezer wrap and heavy-duty foil. Try using freezer tape to keep air out. Or use freezer bags like Target's Up & Up Slider bags, which did well in recent tests. Squeeze air out first.

Do thaw safely. In the refrigerator at 40° F or below, in a microwave on defrost setting, or in cold water in packaging (change water every 30 mins). Use the microwave and cold-water options only if you plan to cook the food immediately. Food thawed in the refrigerator and then cooked can be safely refrozen, although it can lose quality. Never thaw foods on the countertop, which can cause microorganisms to grow and spread.

