Ingredients to avoid

This is a partial list to get you started on cleaning out your cupboards. Keep in mind that what impacts your health most is what you do on a daily basis. Get rid of as much of the bad stuff as you possibly can. These additives are usually used in processed foods – foods that are high fat, sugar, starch, lack dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients and other nutrients that make food *good*. Another way these foods negatively impact health, especially in children, is that because the flavors are so much more intense and "exciting" than natural foods, natural foods taste plain and boring by comparison.

Once natural foods are the staple diet, these chemicalized foods will no longer taste good by comparison – however, there is a period of adjustment necessary. Your taste buds may require some reeducation.

MSG - MSG is one of the worst food additives on the market and is used in canned soups, crackers, meats, salad dressings, frozen dinners and much more. MSG is an excitotoxin, which means it overexcites your cells to the point of damage or death, causing brain damage to varying degrees -- and potentially even triggering or worsening learning disabilities, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, Lou Gehrig's disease and others. Many other adverse effects have also been linked to regular consumption of MSG, including: obesity, eye damage, headaches, fatigue and disorientation, and depression. It is also known as:

- Autolyzed Yeast
- Calcium Caseinate
- Gelatin
- Glutamate
- Glutamic Acid
- Hydrolyzed Protein
- Monopotassium Glutamate
- Monosodium Glutamate
- Sodium Caseinate
- Textured Protein
- Yeast Extract
- Yeast Food
- Yeast Nutrient

Hydrogenated oils – or Trans fat, increases blood levels of low density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad" cholesterol, while lowering levels of high density lipoprotein (HDL), known as "good" cholesterol. It can also cause major clogging of arteries, type 2 diabetes and other serious health problems, and was found to increase the risk of heart disease. Many food companies use trans fat instead of oil because it reduces cost, extends storage life of products and can improve flavor and texture. It is also known as:

- Margarine
- Crisco
- Vegetable shortening
- Shortening
- Partially hydrogenated vegetable oil

Sodium nitrite - This is a preservative, coloring, and flavoring commonly added to bacon, ham, hot dogs, luncheon meats, smoked fish, and corned beef. Studies have linked it to various types of cancer. Some experts consider it one of the most potentially harmful food additives.

Sugar– also known as:

- Sucrose (table sugar)
- High fructose corn syrup
- Fructose (fruit sugar - fruits eaten whole are ok)
- Dextrose or glucose
- Lactose (milk sugar)
- Anything with the ending "ose"

Sugar substitutes are probably more dangerous than sugar itself.
Look for the following items. These are the most common brands, but always read the labels since they can be included in other brands/products as well:

- Aspartame (Nutra Sweet)
- Sucralose (Splenda)
- Acesulfame-K (Sunnet)
- Saccharin (Sweet'n Low)

In general, choose packaged foods with short, simple ingredient lists with items you recognize as food. Avoid the ones with long, complex ingredients lists that don't sound like food names.

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The lingo of expiration dates

- **Expiration** date - refers to the last date a food should be eaten or used. Last means last -- proceed at your own risk.
- **"Sell by"** date - Tells the store how long to display the product for sale. The "sell by" date is the last day the item is at its highest level of quality, but it will still be edible for some time after.
- **"Best if used by (or before)"** date - This refers to quality, not safety. This date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **"Guaranteed fresh"** date - This usually refers to bakery items. They will still be edible after the date, but not as fresh.
- **"Use by"** date - Determined by the manufacturer of the product This is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality.
- **"Pack"** date - You will find this on canned or packaged goods, but it's tricky. In fact, it may be in code. It can be month-day-year-MMDDYY. Or the manufacturer could revert to the Julian calendar. January would then be 001-0031 and December 334-365. It gets even weirder than that.

How Long Are Foods OK to Eat?

- Milk - Usually fine until a week after the "Sell By" date.
- Eggs - OK for 3-5 weeks after you bring them home (assuming you bought them before the "sell by" date
- Poultry and seafood - Cook or freeze this within a day or two.
- Beef and pork - Cook or freeze within 3 to 5 days.
- Canned goods - Highly acidic foods like tomato sauce can keep 18 months or more. Low-acid foods like canned green beans are probably risk-free for up to five years. Keeping canned and dry food at 50 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit in a dry, dark place prolongs the time they will keep.
- **The fresher food is when you buy it, the longer it will last!

Food Safety Tips

Since product dates don't give you a true guide to safe use of a product, here are some other tips from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Services:

- Purchase the product before the date expires.
- If perishable, take the food home immediately after purchase and refrigerate it promptly. It is a good idea to keep a cooler or cooler bag in the car for impromptu shopping trips.
- Freeze it if you can't use it within times recommended on the chart.
- Once a perishable product is frozen, it doesn't matter if the date expires because foods kept frozen continuously are safe indefinitely.
- Follow handling recommendations on product.

Poultry	1 or 2 days
Beef, Veal, Pork, and Lamb	3 to 5 days
Ground Meat and Ground Poultry	1 or 2 days
Fresh Variety Meats (Liver, Tongue, Brain, Kidneys, Heart, Chitterlings)	1 or 2 days
Cured Ham, Cook-Before-Eating	5 to 7 days
Sausage from Pork, Beef or Turkey, Uncooked	1 or 2 days
Eggs	3 to 5 weeks

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Proper food storage

Storing your foods properly will not only prolong its viability, but also preserve the nutrients they contain. You will need to shop less often, saving time and money. Memorizing these food storage guidelines is one of the most important steps to establishing your Perfect Pantry.

Grains - Buy from a source that has rapid turnover. Whole grains lose freshness more quickly than refined flours, so buy the freshest product possible. Refrigerate or freeze whole grains and whole grain flours unless they will be used with in a couple of weeks. Use plastic or glass containers with tight lids. Warm temperatures can quickly turn whole grains rancid.

Nuts & seeds – Nothing spoils nuts faster than exposing them to light, heat and moisture. It is best to store them refrigerated in airtight bags. Freezing can destroy vitamin E, but that is vastly preferable to rancidity** that occurs rather quickly with improper storage methods.

Beans - Dry beans should be stored at room temperature in covered containers or airtight plastic bags. They will keep almost indefinitely. Do not keep dry beans in the refrigerator. If stored incorrectly, the beans may absorb water and spoil before you have a chance to use them.

Fruits – keep apples and pears in the fruit drawer of the refrigerator with the vent open. Fruits that need further ripening can be place in a paper bag on the kitchen counter before being put in the refrigerator. Citrus frits and bananas can be kept on the counter. Lemons and limes can be kept at room temperature for about two weeks. They will keep for up to six weeks in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Vegetables – Store separate from fruits. The ethylene gas produced by fruit will make vegetables bitter. Most vegetables need cold and moist storage conditions. Exceptions are: tomatoes, beans, peppers, cucumber and eggplant, which need cool and moist conditions. Hot peppers, pumpkins, winter squash, and sweet potatoes want warm dry conditions.

Onions and potatoes – Onions and garlic prefer cool dry conditions. A basket in a cool cupboard works well. Potatoes must be stored separately or they will spoil each other. Store potatoes in a separate, cool cupboard in a perforated paper bag to retain some moisture.

Meat – For top quality, use within 2-3 days of purchase. Ground meats and variety meats should be used in 24 hours. It may be frozen without rewrapping and store in the freezer 1 -2 weeks. For longer freezer storage, the original package should be over wrapped with special freezer material.

Dairy - • Get our dairy product into the fridge quickly after purchase. Always store dairy products below 39°F. Don't store dairy products in the door of your fridge. The door can be as much as 10° warmer than the rest of the fridge. Store dairy products away from strong smelling foods. Dairy products can absorb aromas.

Cans & jars - Store in a cool, clean & dry place where temperatures are below 85 degrees. Between 50-70 degrees is best. Never allow them to freeze. Use within 12 months.

Cold and moist – 32°F, 95% humidity
Cool and moist – 40-50°F, 90-95% humidity
Cool and dry - 32°F, 65-70% humidity
Warm and dry – 50-60°F, 50-80% humidity

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Rotating stock

Develop a good system for rotating your stock. You can write dates on items, physically move the oldest to the front and but the new behind, or a combination of these. Either way, do it. It is a good idea to go through your pantry at least once per year and get rid of anything that is past or getting to the point that by the time you do use it, it will be. If you do this between Halloween and thanksgiving, you can give it to a food bank where it will be use in a timely manner.

Rancidity

Rancidity is the oxidation of fats that spoils the taste of food as well as causes damage to enzymes, vitamins, membranes and proteins. Rancid fats have been implicated in increased rates of heart disease, atherosclerosis and are carcinogenic (cancer causing). They also play a part in the ageing process.

All oils are fats, but not all fats are oils. They are very similar to each other, but what makes one an oil and another a fat is the percentage of hydrogen in the fatty acids. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature (70F) and unsaturated fats, or oils, are liquid at room temperature.

Oxygen is soluble in fats. The oxidation resulting from this exposure is the primary cause of rancidity. The more polyunsaturated a fat is, the faster it will go rancid. Vegetable oils have to become several times more rancid than animal fats before our noses can detect a difference.

Smell and taste oil before use. If it smells like oil paint or leaves a scratchy sensation in the back of your throat it is rancid and should be discarded. Foods that are particularly prone to rancidity are nuts, seeds, and whole grains.

**It is common for brown rice sold in large grocery stores to be rancid before it is has been purchased. This is partly because it is rarely packaged air tight, and because where it is not a high turn over item, it will have been there for a while by the time it is sold.

Stretching the Expiration Date Through Proper Storage

Food needing refrigeration should be kept below 41 degrees. On the loading dock, in the car, on the kitchen table, it should not be outside of that temperature for more than four hours total. You have no idea how long it may have been subjected to higher temperatures before you buy it, so you need to minimize the "standing" factor after you get it. Lag time, as in not getting it properly stored ASAP, is one of the biggest mistakes consumers make. Also, most fridges usually aren't holding at 41 degrees or less-- They gain in temperature every time the door is opened.

- Milk should be kept at 38 degrees, fish at 32 degrees. The drawers and shelves have different temperatures, thus the term "meat drawer."
- It is Ok to use your senses to decide if an item is fresh. The more you practice, the more refined your senses will get.
- Air-tight packaging can double shelf life. The item will be good as the day it was packaged for quite a while.

Why Should You Care About Pesticides?

The growing consensus among scientists is that small doses of pesticides and other chemicals can cause lasting damage to human health, especially during fetal development and early childhood. Scientists now know enough about the long-term consequences of ingesting these powerful chemicals to advise that we minimize our consumption of pesticides.

What's the Difference?

EWG research has found that people who eat the 12 most contaminated fruits and vegetables consume an average of 10 pesticides a day. Those who eat the 15 least contaminated conventionally-grown fruits and vegetables ingest fewer than 2 pesticides daily. The Guide helps consumers make informed choices to lower their dietary pesticide load.

Will Washing and Peeling Help?

Nearly all the studies used to create these lists assume that people rinse or peel fresh produce. Rinsing reduces but does not eliminate pesticides. Peeling helps, but valuable nutrients often go down the drain with the skin. The best approach: eat a varied diet, rinse all produce and buy organic when possible.

How Was This Guide Developed?

EWG analysts have developed the Guide based on data from nearly 87,000 tests for pesticide residues in produce conducted between 2000 and 2007 and collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. You can find a detailed description of the criteria EWG used to develop these rankings and the complete list of fruits and vegetables tested at our dedicated website, www.foodnews.org.