

# Do sweets go out of date?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Sweets do not really go off in the way that milk or meat does. Most carry a best before date rather than a use by date, and some need no date at all. That is because of what sweets are made of: mostly sugar, with very little water.

## Best before, not use by

There are two kinds of date on food in Britain, and they mean different things.

- **Best before** is about quality. It tells you when the food might start to reduce in quality. After the best before date, the government says, food is usually safe to eat but may not be of the same quality.
- **Use by** is about safety. It tells you when the food is no longer safe to eat, and eating food after its use by date could make you ill.

Sweets usually carry a best before date. When the date is given as a day, it says best before; when it gives only a month or a year, the label says best before end.

## Some sweets need no date

UK food law, which carried over the European rules, lists a handful of foods that do not need a best before date at all. Two of them are sweets:

- confectionery made almost solely of flavoured or coloured sugars
- chewing gum and similar chewing products

The same list includes solid sugar, cooking salt and vinegar.

## Why sweets keep so well

Microbes need water to grow, and most sweets have very little free water. Food scientists measure this as water activity. The lower it is, the fewer microorganisms can grow, and below a certain level, mould growth is inhibited, which is why low water foods have a longer shelf life. Hard boiled sweets are nearly 100 per cent sugar with almost no water left in them.

## What changes after the date

After the date, the changes you are likely to notice are in texture and looks. Water moves from moist places to dry ones, so soft sweets left in dry air can dry out and harden, while hard sweets in damp air absorb water and go sticky: see [why do jelly sweets go hard?](#) and [why does seaside rock go soft?](#)

Chocolate can develop a whitish coating called bloom, from fat or from sugar crystals. Bloom spoils the look and feel of chocolate but does not limit its shelf life, and bloomed chocolate is still safe to eat.

## Storage matters

The date only works if the sweets are stored properly. The government's guidance warns that if you do not store food properly, it could reduce in quality before the best before date. Keep sweets sealed, cool and dry: see [how should you store pick and mix?](#)

As with any food, if something looks, smells or tastes wrong, throw it away.

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