How to Tell if Bacon Is Bad

Three Methods: Judging Your Bacon  Shopping for Bacon  Storing Bacon

Bacon, one of the top foods of the last decade,[1] looks set to remain an important choice in the American diet (important here being a vast understatement). While fresh bacon is a delight, improperly stored bacon can spoil quickly and result in illness from bacteria such as Salmonella and E. coli. Knowing whether or not the bacon is of good quality is an important part of healthy cooking and eating at home.

Method 1 Judging Your Bacon

1 Check the expiry date on the bacon packet. If the "use by" date has expired, then that bacon is unsafe to use. Always use bacon within seven days of purchase ("sell by") or by the "use by" date listed by the manufacturer.

   • Take care not to confuse the "sell by" and "use by" dates. The first is the store's guidance, the latter is the manufacturer's expiration date. The "sell by" date signals that you need to get on with consuming the bacon sooner rather than later but the bacon is still safe to eat (provided no other signs of poor storage are revealed).

2 Be a bit more lenient if it's unopened. If you bought a package of bacon last week and didn't get around to using it, it's possible it's still good. The same wouldn't be said if you had opened it, taken a whiff, and put it back, but if it's still sealed, it should have a bit longer life.

   • Your bacon may last for up to two weeks upon purchased if you stored it properly and didn't open it.[2] Open 'er up and do some of the following tests. If it seems like good bacon, your judgment call is probably accurate.

3 Smell the bacon. Whether it's on a plate, or in its packet, it will have the same smell. If you aren't sure that the bacon is good, smell it carefully. If it smells like fresh meat, then it's not spoiled. If it smells weird, like rotting, sour or an offish odor, then it is probably spoiled.

   • You know what bacon smells like, right? That delicious, Ron-Swanson-is-on-his-way scent? That's the one. If there's even a semblance of a doubt that it smells as delicious as it should, don't risk it. The bacteria ain't worth it.

4 Take a good look at the bacon. Go to a room with a good light source and take a look at the bacon. Good, non-spoiled bacon, should have a fresh, pinkish color and be bright. Bacon is a pink meat with white fat, and sometimes yellowish. If you notice that the bacon has green dots all over, looks dull or that the flesh is turning a gray-brown, then it's not fresh bacon.

   • You may be thinking at this juncture, "It's bacon. It's always good. Bacon that exists is good bacon." Not true. The last thing you want is to have a bad bacon experience, conditioning you to never eat bacon again, right? Think of the long-term risks here.

5 Feel the bacon. Bacon is usually not slimy. If you noticed that the bacon you are holding is slimy, then it's most likely spoiled. Again, throw it out.

   • And wash your hands afterwards. Just because you didn't eat the bacteria means you should leave it on your hands.

6 Throw the bacon out properly. After you have checked whether the bacon is spoiled, throw it out if necessary. Wrap it well and toss it into the garbage bin outdoors (so it doesn't smell up your indoor trash can). Then wash
your hands well. Do not feed it to your pets — they may be harmed by the bacteria too.

Method

Shopping for Bacon

1 Purchase the bacon immediately before you check out. Eliminate the time between bacon retrieval (huzzah!) and the check-out counter. You don't want it to cool down under your pile of Captain Crunch and Miracle Whip. When you get home, promptly place the package of bacon in the refrigerator. Store the bacon at 40°F/4.4°C or lower.
   - If you have a cold storage bag, make use of it! Keep it cool on the journey home. Your bacon deserves an honorable last few days, does it not?

2 Look for bacon with just a few ingredients. Nowadays if something doesn't come with at least four ingredients that have 7 syllables, it's something to write home about. Luckily, healthier trends are picking up -- so if you have an extra dollar to spend, go for bacon with a list of ingredients you're confident in pronouncing.
   - Aim for four or so ingredients -- pork (ya think?), water, salt, and brown sugar. That other stuff is the basics for curing pork (turning it into bacon). The crap in "regular" bacon is just preservatives and chemicals.

3 Don't fall for the "no nitrates added" sticker. That just means that they're not using sodium nitrate when the cure it and instead they use celery. However, celery has loads of nitrates, too (all veggies do), so it's really six of one and half a dozen of the other.
   - The best bacon will be grown (...suuuure) locally, use very few preservatives, be super fresh, and be from pigs that were raised humanely, of course. That being said, you could always cure it yourself!

Method

Storing Bacon

1 Freeze the bacon for long-term storage. Bacon can be safely frozen up to 1-4 months at 0°F/-17°C or lower.[3] However, that said, note that the USDA advises that frozen bacon loses quality after 1-2 months,[4] as bacon rancidity still develops in the freezer.
   - See How to freeze bacon for a neat trick on freezing bacon slices individually. What other website do you need apart from this one?

2 Cook the bacon, and then store it. If you've prepared the bacon, it may keep longer if you cook it and then store it in the fridge in an air-tight, resealable container (dab the grease off first).[5] Different types of bacon keep for different lengths of time.
   - Cooked bacon in strips lasts for around a week post-cooking, in the fridge. If you freeze it, it will last up to 6 months.[2] Just cook it a bit less than you like it, so when you go to warm it up, it doesn't overcook.
   - Bacon bits will last for about 6 weeks in the fridge, and 6 months in the freezer.[2]

3 Monitor frozen bacon. If it's in the freezer too long, the fat will go rancid. In addition, the ends could turn hard, brown, and become inedible. If the latter is the case, just whack the ends off and cook as normal. But if it smells, has any of the symptoms described above, or looks funny in the slightest, it shouldn't be eaten.
   - Slab bacon doesn't freeze well. There's too much salt, causing the fat to go rancid even more quickly. Stick to freezing bacon in smaller sections.

Community Q&A

Can I use unopened bacon if it has been in the freezer for a few years?

Yes, you may use the frozen bacon if it has not been opened and has been in the freezer for less than two years.
What do I do if I eat bad bacon?

If you are ever unfortunate enough to eat bad bacon, then you might have a serious condition of food poisoning.

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Tips

- *Staphylococcus aureus* is a common source of food poisoning because it isn't deterred by salty, cured meats, leading some people to a false sense of security thinking that the salt makes the food safe.

Warnings

- Don't eat or even cook bacon if you aren't sure that it is fresh.

Sources and Citations


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