

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Does My Soda Expire?

If you happen to look closely, you might find a date printed on your cans of soda. Considering the way we drink soda, it may be unusual in your house to have any last long enough to be past the date. But with the rise of couponing, buying extra when the price is low, stockpiling for future emergencies and other changes in how we buy our food, people are finding sodas in their closets that are 'too old'. But do they really have to throw them away?

Most of the time a date on a can or bottle of soda will be either a Use by... or a Best if Used by... date. These refer to how long the manufacturer thinks his product will still taste the best. Sometimes it could be a Sell by... date, the date the store wants to see it gone. But none of these are Expiration dates, and none refer to safety problems.

So, what happens that could make soda not taste good? The most common defect that happens when soda gets old is that it goes flat. The carbon dioxide that makes the bubbles and fizz has all leaked out. It doesn't taste as good but it won't hurt anyone. In fact some recipes for cooking with soda call for using soda that has been allowed to go flat.

Beyond that, regular soda won't 'spoil'. There's enough acid and enough sugar in it that not much of anything will grow. So you are not going to get sick by drinking soda that is past the date on the can or bottle.

But, diet sodas can be a different story. One of the non-caloric sweeteners used in some diet sodas is aspartame, or Equal®. This sweetener is made by joining two

amino acids. Amino acids linked in long chains make proteins. But these two tied together in a certain way are very, very sweet. When we digest the sweetener our body uses them to make more protein.

However, single amino acids are very, very bitter! If diet sodas sit for too long, especially if they are stored in warm to hot conditions, the sweetener can begin to break down. If you taste one of these, your mouth will pucker, because what was very sweet has become very bitter. It is a strong taste, not something that other flavors in there can cover up. So diet sodas generally have a shorter storage life than regular sodas. Keep an eye on your diet soda stash and use the older ones regularly.

Another problem that can happen with either kind of soda concerns metal cans. Sodas are very acidic. Cans are coated inside with a lining to protect the aluminum from the acid. But the coating might not be perfect. If there is a tiny defect, a bit of a bubble where the coating is not complete, the acidic soda will touch the metal. When the cans are stored for long periods of time, the acid can eat a hole right through the can.

When that happens first the carbon dioxide will leak out and the soda will go flat. But before too long the soda will leak out too. If you don't catch it in time, you'll have a puddle on the floor, a really bad stain on the carpeting and empty cans.

Soda in plastic or glass bottles can also have problems, especially if they are stored in direct sunlight. Some of the colors and occasionally the flavors can be affected by strong light over long storage. Old soda in plastic bottles can be flat, pale and flavorless. Again, it's not going to make you sick. But it won't look or taste good.

If you have an old can of cola sitting around, here's the super simple recipe you need. The sugar and caramel coloring in colas help brown the meat. The sweetness of cola is usually a good balance with pork chops or loins. Some folks prefer to spice up a recipe like this with finely minced hot pepper, or maybe add a couple dashes of pepper sauce. Bake 4 halved acorn squash in a separate pan at the same time. Serve with a big salad for dinner. Enjoy!

Cola Chops

8 pork chops

1 cup ketchup

1 cup cola soda

salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350° F. Lay chops in baking dish in single layer or just slightly overlapping. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Combine soda and ketchup in small bowl. Pour evenly over chops. Bake for 1 hour, until chops register 145°F in center and squash is tender. Drizzle some of the pan juices over the squash about 10 min before the end of baking. Serves 8.