

WELLNESS

PRINTED FROM
PRESSREADER

NOT FOR SALE

periodicalqcpubliclibrary@gmail.com

PERSONAL
COPY

YASU & JUNKO/TRUNK ARCHIVE.

Healthy Up Your Home

Milk and eggs aren't the only things with an expiration date. Check out some surprising items you should toss and replace— for the sake of your health.

BY STACEY COLINO

Y

■ ■ ■ You don't need us to tell you to trash that weeks-old package of ground turkey you forgot to cook

or that long-expired bottle of cough syrup. Some things are clearly past their prime, and using them could have a negative impact on your health. But there is other stuff all over your house that is no longer good for you either, though it may be less obvious. And when life is busy (when *isn't* it?), it's easy to miss the signs that it's time to take these things out of rotation.

But don't overthink it. Our room-

WELLNESS

by-room guide can help you identify products that may not have a use-by date stamped right on them but do in fact have limited life spans. Here's when, why, and how to toss, repurpose, or recycle them. (When it comes to recycling atypical items, check with your local sanitation department to see what it offers; you can also try earth911.com and search by your zip code.)

KITCHEN

Sponges

- ▶ **Life span** 30 days
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** Moisture-rich sponges are breeding grounds for bacteria such as *E. coli* and salmonella, warns Chuck Gerba, Ph.D., a professor of environmental science at the University of Arizona in Tucson. "In our research, we've found that the bacteria get to really high numbers in three to four days," he says. To disinfect sponges in the meantime, put them in the microwave for 30 seconds or run them through the dishwasher every few days.
- ▶ **How-to** You can compost cellulose sponges, Gerba advises.

Floor Mops

- ▶ **Life span** Two to three months
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** Replace the mophead even sooner if it smells bad, as that's a sign of major bacterial growth, Gerba says. Otherwise you run

the risk of spreading bacteria throughout your home (yuck!).

- ▶ **How-to** Just toss them. You may be able to recycle a wooden mop handle, but not the mophead.

Cutting Boards

- ▶ **Life span** Until they have scratches
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** The gashes can harbor illness-causing bacteria, Gerba says. To prolong their life, put plastic cutting boards in the dishwasher and clean wooden ones with bleach or disinfectant.
- ▶ **How-to** Recycle.



Nonstick Pots and Pans

▶ **Life span** Until the surface is peeling or scratched

▶ **Why say goodbye?** “Nonstick cookware contains forever chemicals called PFAs [perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances] that are potentially carcinogenic,” says Ryan Sinclair, Ph.D., M.P.H., an associate professor of environmental microbiology at Loma

Linda University. Using a metal spatula or other mishandling may damage the surface, and you may not realize it.

“If the surface is flaking, microparticles can get into your food and stay in your body,” Sinclair says, suggesting that you replace them with cast-iron or stainless steel pots and pans.

▶ **How-to** Whether you can recycle them or send them to a scrapyard may depend on where you live.



GETTY IMAGES

WELLNESS

Plastic Food Storage Containers

- ▶ **Life span** Until they show signs of wear
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** If your go-to plastic containers for leftovers are changing in texture or color (e.g., if they are cloudy or tinged red from last

month's spaghetti) or becoming brittle, it's time to get rid of them, Sinclair says. This is because, as they degrade, many plastic containers, even high-end ones, can shed oxidized compounds that can get into food and thus into your body, he explains. Consider replacing them with glass or stainless steel containers, which do not leach chemicals.

- ▶ **How-to** Recycle them.



GETTY IMAGES.

Cleaning Products

- ▶ **Life span** Six months to two years
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** Cleaning products can lose potency over time. For example, once the container has been opened, bleach loses its effectiveness after six months, and if used past its prime it won't disinfect properly, Gerba warns. Multisurface cleaners and other water-soluble household cleaning products aren't likely to lose their cleaning ability until they're about two years old, Sinclair says.
- ▶ **How-to** Pour them down the drain with the water running.

BEDROOM

Pillows

- ▶ **Life span** One to three years
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** Most pillows stay in reasonably good shape for only a few years, and how long they last depends on what they're made of, says Michael Breus, Ph.D., a Los Angeles-based clinical sleep specialist. Memory foam pillows, for example, are at the high end of the longevity spectrum, while feather and down pillows are at the low end. When a pillow loses its shape or becomes lumpy, that could increase your risk of developing neck, shoulder, or upper-back pain. And because pillows absorb sweat, body oils, dead skin cells, and dust, continuing

to use a too-old pillow may lead you to have allergy or asthma-related flare-ups or skin irritation over time. Regular washing can help minimize these risks.

- ▶ **How-to** After washing them, donate old pillows to an animal shelter or charity or repurpose them as packing material for fragile items.

Mattresses

- ▶ **Life span** Between seven and 12 years, depending on the type and quality
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** Mattresses wear out. If you regularly wake up with stiffness, soreness, or lower-back pain, it's time to consider getting a new one, says Breus. That's because a mattress should keep your spine aligned so your muscles can relax. If your mattress continues to feel good after 12 years, it's fine to keep using it; rotating it periodically may help prolong its life.
- ▶ **How-to** Donate it to a charity if there's still life in it, or see if a nearby recycling center will accept mattresses.

Smoke Alarms

- ▶ **Life span** Up to 10 years
- ▶ **Why say goodbye?** "Smoke alarms can last for only up to 10 years after the date they're manufactured. When you install them, it's important to write the 10-year replacement date in an area you can see," says Kelly Ransdell, director of public education at the National Fire Protection Association.

WELLNESS

“New alarms have an end-of-life chirp, but if you’re not sure, look for the date of manufacture and replace the alarm if it’s more than 10 years old.”

▶ **How-to** Recycle (though some communities allow traditional smoke alarms in household trash).

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms

▶ **Life span** Five to 10 years

▶ **Why say goodbye?** Its detection powers may have diminished, so it’s risky to continue to use it after hearing its end-of-life chirp. Note the manufacture date on the CO alarm and replace it after 10 years even if you have yet to hear a chirp. If you hold on to it too long, it may not recognize an elevated level of CO in your home, which could be fatal, says Brian O’Connor, a senior technical services engineer at the National Fire Protection Association.

▶ **How-to** Recycle it or toss it (some communities allow CO alarms in household trash).

BATHROOM

Toothbrushes

▶ **Life span** Three to four months

▶ **Why say goodbye?** Worn-out bristles can’t clean your teeth properly, according to the American Dental

Association, and this may put you at higher risk of developing plaque or cavities. No matter how long you’ve used a brush, if the bristles are frayed, replace it.

▶ **How-to** If you can’t reuse them for, say, cleaning white sneakers, recycle them or throw them out.

Loofahs

▶ **Life span** It depends—it’s time to toss a loofah when its color looks odd, it smells strange, or you see mold growing in it, says Doris Day, M.D., a clinical associate professor of dermatology at NYU Langone Health and the author of *Rebooting the Biome*.

▶ **Why say goodbye?** Loofahs can harbor a ton of bacteria because they’re sitting in a moist environment and skin cells can get embedded in their nooks and crannies. This could lead to an infection if you have small breaks in your skin, warns Dr. Day. To minimize the risk, rinse the loofah, shake it out, and store it in a dry place (outside the shower) between uses.

▶ **How-to** Compost a natural loofah; throw out or recycle a plastic one, depending on local rules.

Disposable Razors

▶ **Life span** Three uses

▶ **Why say goodbye?** Dr. Day says a disposable razor is meant to be just that—disposable. The blade of a less expensive razor can become dull quickly, and water can corrode the sensor strip,

causing it to break down. Continuing to use such a razor could lead to a rash or an infection after you get a cut while shaving. And if any razor looks rusty or if you regularly nick yourself with it, throw it away.

▶ **How-to** Trash it.

Moisturizers

▶ **Life span** One year

▶ **Why say goodbye?** Over time, facial moisturizers lose moisture. Also, you could contaminate the product if you're dipping your fingers into the jar day after day, Dr. Day says—and if a moisturizer gets contaminated, you risk skin irritation if you continue to use it.

▶ **How-to** Toss the cream; recycle the containers.

Shower Curtains

▶ **Life span** It depends on the material but a good rule is, when you start to see mold or mildew growing on the liner, replace it with a new one.

▶ **Why say goodbye?** The mold and mildew could become airborne while you're taking a shower (ick!), which could irritate your airways, aggravate asthma, or cause an infection if you or a family member is immunocompromised, Dr. Day says. You can try cleaning the curtain with bleach, which may lengthen its life.

▶ **How-to** Toss or recycle it, depending on what it's made of.

