

## Know your 'best by' from 'use by' when food shopping

08/11/2010 | Most food products carry labels that show the date when a product should be bought by or when to use it by to ensure it is at its best quality.

Know what the date labels mean and then determine what is safe to keep and what should be thrown away.

- **Best by/before.** This term means just what it says — it is best to purchase the product by the date on the container.

'Best by/before' or 'best if used by' refers to a quality or flavour of the food and is usually used on foods that last longer, such as frozen, dried or canned foods. While you can safely eat food after this date, it will often no longer be at its best.

Common foods with this label include margarine, popsicles, mayonnaise, peanut butter, marmalade and some frozen patties.

- **Sell by/Display until.** The 'sell by' date has more to do with quality than safety. This label is more a guide to the store on how long to display the product for sale.

Stores will use this to ensure staff knows when to remove the item from the shelves, usually a few days before the 'use by' date so consumers have some days left to use the food.

- **Use by.** This is an expiration date set by the manufacturer. It means exactly what it says. Consuming after this date is not recommended.

'Use by' dates can be found on foods that have to be stored at low temperatures to maintain their safety more than their quality.



These foods have a short product life after being manufactured and go off quickly, such as milk, soft cheese and bagged salads.

When buying meat, if the 'sell by' date is three days away, your refrigerator at home usually is not cool enough to keep the meat fresh for more than two days.

The temperature of a home refrigerator is about 36-40F — to keep other things from freezing — and raw meat is kept at about 30F. If you are not going to eat the meat within a few days you should freeze it.

Be very careful with eggs as they can contain salmonella bacteria and should not be eaten after the best before date. However, if the label says 'sell-by', they can last as long as three weeks if refrigerated properly.

Interestingly, eggs should be stored in their original carton on a shelf, not in the door as it is not as cold.

Look in your fridge and cupboards, check the dates on your groceries and read the storage information and follow any instructions on the packaging, such as 'refrigerate - after opening', 'do not freeze' and 'store in a cool, dry place'.

Regardless of the date on any product, it is simple to check items for a bad odour, a strange appearance or unpleasant taste. When in doubt, throw it out.

