

How to?



## 12) Use Food Date Labels correctly

### Why is this important?

Foods are labelled with date codes to provide valuable information which can be used to interpret whether the food will be safe to use or will be of the best possible quality for use.

There are two main types of food labels used, both different from each other and the information which they contain. These labels are:

#### 'Use by'

'Use by' dates are on foods that go off quickly, like raw meat or fish, cooked sliced meats, dairy products and prepared salads.

The 'use by' date should be checked before the food is either cooked or eaten. After the 'use by' date, food could be unsafe to eat, even if it looks and smells fine.

In order for the 'use by' date to be a valid guide, the storage instructions on the product, e.g. "keep in a refrigerator" must be followed, from the moment that food is delivered onto the premises. In carrying out the food delivery checks and recording these temperatures, this acts as your record that food has been under temperature control once it was received.

If you don't follow these instructions, the food will spoil more quickly than that of the stated 'use by' date, risking the development of food poisoning bacteria.

#### 'Best before'

The 'Best before' date appears on a wide range of frozen, dried, tinned and other foods, such as bread, pasta, baked beans etc.

'Best before' dates are about quality, not safety. When the date is passed, it doesn't mean that the food will be harmful, but it might begin to lose its flavour and texture.

The 'best before' date will only be accurate if the food is stored according to the instructions on the label.

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### Check your understanding by:

What is the major difference between a 'Use by' date and a 'Best before' date?

Give an example of a food with a 'Best before' date?

Give an example of a food with a 'Use by' date?

True or False: Eating food after the 'Best before' date won't hurt you?

Other than using food within a 'Use by', what else is essential to ensure the safety of the food?

### You can tell it's correct if:

All foods on the premises are within their 'Use by' dates.

All foods are being stored according to manufacturers instructions.

A good system of stock rotation is in place.

### Hints and tips:

Always keep an eye on the foods which are not likely to be used before the 'Best before' or 'Use by' date. This will ensure that a stock rotation system can be implemented fully, as well as ensuring legal compliance.