

## **‘Best Before’ and ‘Use by’ Dates**

### DATE MARKS ON FOOD LABELS

Food labels have date marks to tell us about safe shelf life. These marks help us tell how long food can be kept before it begins to deteriorate. All food with a shelf life of less than 2 years must be date marked.

**'USE BY':** foods must be eaten or thrown away by the date

After this date foods may be unsafe to eat even if they look fine because the nutrients in the food may become unstable or a build-up of bacteria may occur. It is illegal to sell foods after a 'use-by' date. Common 'use-by' foods include milk, sliced ham, and shaved meats.

**'BEST BEFORE':** foods are still safe to eat after the date as long as they are not damaged, deteriorated or perished

The 'best before' date simply indicates that the product may have lost some its quality after this date passes. Foods can be legally sold after a 'best before' date (as long as they are not damaged, deteriorated or perished). You can expect these foods to retain their colour, taste, texture and flavour as long as they are stored correctly. Common 'best before' foods include canned foods, cereals, biscuits, sauces, chocolate, sugar, flour and frozen foods.

### STORAGE REQUIREMENTS

To make sure food lasts until its date, it's important to follow storage instructions, such as 'Keep refrigerated' and 'Store in a cool, dark place'. If a product requires specific storage instructions to remain safe until its 'use-by' or 'best before' date, manufacturers have to include this information on a label.

It's also important to follow any preparation or cooking instructions shown on the label, including heating and defrosting times. Again, manufacturers have to provide preparation directions on food labels for any foods which require specific preparation to ensure they are safe.

Following such instructions is extremely important because they can help you to kill any harmful bacteria which may be present naturally in some foods.