

Food Advise Relating to Use-By Dates and Best Before Dates

The following information has been taken from the Food Standards Agency Website

What do 'use by', 'best before' and 'display until' mean?

'Use by' means exactly that. You shouldn't use any food or drink after the end of the 'use by' date shown on the label. Even if it looks and smells fine, using it after this date could put your health at risk and cause food poisoning.

You will usually find a 'use by' date on food that goes off quickly, such as milk, soft cheese, ready-prepared salads and smoked fish.

It's also important to follow any storage instructions given on food labels, otherwise the food might not last until the 'use by' date. Usually food with a 'use by' date needs to be kept in the fridge.

'Best before' dates are usually used on foods that last longer, such as frozen, dried or canned foods. It should be safe to eat food after the 'best before' date, but the food will no longer be at its best. After this date, the food might begin to lose its flavour and texture.

However, you shouldn't eat eggs after the 'best before' date. This is because eggs can contain salmonella bacteria, which could start to multiply after this date.

Some food labels also give instructions such as 'eat within a week of opening' and it's important to follow these instructions. But remember, if the 'use by' date is tomorrow, then you must use the food by the end of tomorrow, even if the label says 'eat within a week of opening' and you have only opened the food today.

'Display until' and 'sell by' dates are instructions for shop staff to tell them when they should take a product off the shelves.

Source: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/asksam/foodlabels/asksamlabelterms/>

Is it legal to sell products past their 'best before' date?

Shops are allowed to sell food after its 'best before' date has passed. 'best before' dates are concerned with quality rather than safety, so it doesn't mean that the food is dangerous if the 'best before' date has passed. However, if you buy food after the date, remember that it might no longer be at its best.

'Use by' dates are different to 'best before' dates and **it is against the law to sell any food that has passed its 'use by' date**. Using it after this date could put your health at risk.

In all cases, whether or not the 'best before' date has expired, the law says that food sold must not put people's health at risk and must not be falsely or misleadingly described or presented.

Source: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/asksam/foodlabels/asksamlabellingrules/>

I bought a sandwich and when I got home I realised that its 'use by' date was two days ago. What should I do?

Don't eat the sandwich. You shouldn't eat any food product that has passed its 'use by' date, because it might not be safe to eat. In fact, it's illegal for shops to sell food after its 'use by' date.

You could take the sandwich back to the shop where you bought it and ask for an exchange or refund. Or you could contact the trading standards or environmental health service at your local authority. It is their responsibility to investigate if they think a shop is not obeying the law, and to take appropriate action. If you decide to contact your local authority, you may need to make a statement and give them the food product and packaging as evidence.

But remember that 'use by' dates are different to other dates you may see on food products. It's not illegal for shops to sell food after its 'best before', 'sell by' or 'display until' date.

Source: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/asksam/foodlabels/asksamlabellingrules/>