

Shelf Life and Stock Rotation

Fact Sheet and Hygiene Rating Improver



1. WHAT DO 'USE-BY' AND 'BEST BEFORE' MEAN?

You must ensure that you do not have any food past its **Use-By date**. This is the date the manufacturer of the food guarantees it's safe to eat. If you sell or provide food past this date it may be unsafe to eat. It is an offence to sell food if the Use-By date has expired.

If you do need to store food which has an expired Use-By date, for example, food which is to be returned to a supplier, it must be separated from other foods and clearly marked as 'not for sale' or 'do not use'.

The **Best Before** date is the date the manufacturer of the food guarantees the quality of that product. This can also be indicated as 'Best Before End' or 'BBE'. Past this date the food is safe to eat but the quality may be poor. If you do use products past their best before date you should bring it to the attention of your customers.

We also refer to the '**shelf life**' of food. If you prepare food, open pre-packed food, or defrost food, it may be unclear what the shelf life of the food is, particularly if there are no manufacturer's instructions on the packaging. In these instances you need to decide what an appropriate shelf life would be. Further information on appropriate shelf life is given below in 'What should I label?'

2. HOW CAN I CONTROL SHELF LIFE AND STOCK ROTATION?

For food that has been opened or defrosted, or dishes you have prepared or cooked, it is a good idea to use, coloured day dots or date labels to keep track of when food should be used or thrown away. Day dots can be purchased from most stationers, and date labels are easily obtained on the internet.

You should check that food passed its shelf life and use by date is thrown away at the end of the day.

3. WHAT SHOULD I LABEL?

Chilled foods that are delivered directly to you or bought from the supermarket will already have a 'Use-By Date' printed on the label. The following types of food should be date labelled by you:

- **Opened chilled foods** – these generally have instructions on the label regarding shelf life once opened. You must follow the manufacturer’s instructions and date label the product accordingly.
- **Chilled foods prepared by you** – these foods may be made up of a variety of ingredients so you must ensure that the food will be used within the time period given to the shortest shelf life, otherwise a 3 days limit should be given including the date made.
- **Frozen foods purchased or prepare** – you should only freeze foods which have 2 or more days left on their shelf life. Frozen foods should be given a shelf life of 1 month.
- **Defrosted foods** – you should re-label foods that have been thawed. Thawed foods should be given a shelf life according to when they were frozen in relation to their original shelf life.
- **Ambient foods which require refrigeration after opening** – this category applies mainly to condiments that can be stored at ambient temperatures until the product is opened. You must follow the manufacturer’s instructions and date label the product accordingly.

4. HOW DO I INCLUDE SHELF LIFE AND STOCK ROTATION IN MY FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

The ‘Chilling’ (blue) section of your Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) pack contains a Safe Method on how you keep track of when food should be used or thrown away.

The ‘Management’ section details the Safe Method for opening and closing checks, which includes throwing away foods past their Use-By date.

When you complete your daily Diary Sheet, you are signing to say that all Safe Methods within the SFBB pack have been followed.



STEP	IMPROVE MY RATING	Done
1	Use-By and Best Before dates of products delivered to your business are checked at the point of delivery.	
2.	You have a system in place for documenting the shelf life of your products, e.g. stock book, coloured day dots or date labels.	
3.	There are daily checks of products to ensure there are no foods past the end of their shelf life.	
4.	Foods past their shelf life or Use-By date are disposed of immediately or separated from other foods.	
5.	There is a written procedure in relation to shelf life and stock rotation, e.g. completed SFBB Safe Methods and Diary Sheets.	
6.	All staff have received training on the written procedure and put it into practice.	