

Food date safety

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To understand that food deteriorates and can become unsafe to eat
- To understand the guidelines for buying and storing food given on packaging
- To understand the language used on food labels relating to dates



RESOURCES

- Range of food labels (Engage activity)
- Copies of Resources 1 and 3
- Copies of Resource 2 (Activity 1 Support)
- Sticky notes (Activity 1)

- Selection of food items showing dates (Action activity)

RELATED THEMES

Food temperature safety (pages 53–61)

HEALTH SKILLS

Food or drink that has gone past its Best before date may still be safe to eat, though its flavour or texture may not be as good to eat as it was before. However, consuming food or drink after the Use by date on the label, even if it looks and smells fine, could put health at risk. Understanding the difference between these two date types and following the date advice is important in order to avoid food poisoning.

SKILLS FOR LIFE

Dates can be recorded in many different formats. This can be confusing, particularly on food labels, which identify Best before and Use by dates in different ways, using abbreviations. In order to interpret dates on food labels accurately, learners need to:

- understand date formats
- find and read information on food labels.

Core curriculum

Activities in this theme will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- understand the words associated with food dates (L Rw/E3.1)
- locate the dates on food labels (L Rt/E3.7)
- know the months of the year in words and abbreviated forms (N MSS1/E2.4)
- know the sequence of months (N MSS1/E2.4)
- know the UK convention of writing the date in order of day, month, year (N MSS1/E2.4).

- Ask for a volunteer to write today's date on the flipchart. Invite learners to think of as many different ways as they can to write the same date in a different format and add these to the flipchart (e.g. 5th September 2007, 5 Sep 07, 05/09/07, 5-9-07, etc.). Ask learners for their birth dates and use these as an opportunity to discuss common abbreviations for months and conventional formats used in the UK.
- Discuss food and dates with learners. Why do we need to think about dates when buying or storing food?
- Give learners some food packaging and ask them to find references to dates. Discuss the different language used to describe dates, such as 'Display until', 'Use by' and 'Best before'. Explain that 'Display until' is intended for the retailer but can be a guide for us as consumers too. The two that learners need to pay attention to are 'Use by' and 'Best before'.
- On the flipchart make two columns, headed 'Use by' and 'Best before'. Write down the suggestions from the group for the meaning of each phrase.
- Summarise the discussion:
 - Best before is a recommendation that you should consume the item before the given date because it will be in better condition then. (After that date, freshness and quality will not be as good, though it may still be safe to eat for a short while.)
 - Use by is an instruction that you must use the food by a certain date. (After that date it is not safe to eat and must be thrown away.)
 - Point out that Use by dates usually do not specify the year, showing that the product has a short shelf life and the date given is in this year. Best before dates usually include the month and year but not the day. These can be the things that get stuck at the back of the cupboard!
 - Finally, point out that the Best before and Use by dates will only be relevant if items have been stored according to the instructions on the label, such as 'store in a cool dry place' or 'keep refrigerated'. They may be superseded by other instructions such as 'Once opened, use within 24 hours'.
- Note: the source of staple foods for people from some cultures may mean that many of the food items in their fridge are not labelled with Use by or Best before dates. Also, fridges may contain more home-cooked foods than items from the supermarket.
- Discuss other ways of working out when such food items are no longer safe to eat or for telling when food has passed its best quality.

What have dates got to do with food?

What happens to milk if you don't use it within a few days?

What is the difference between the 'Use by' and 'Best before' dates?

Can the Use by date differ once the food is opened?

ACTIVITY 1

Understand the difference between Use by and Best before, and read dates on food labels

- Sort the food labels on Resource 1 into two categories, labelling them:
 - A Unsafe to eat after the date
 - B Not such good quality after the date.

- Alternatively, cut the labels apart so that learners can move them around to sort them.
- In pairs, use sticky notes to write down the full date format for each Use by date and then sort them into chronological order. Start with the items that must be used first and end with the items that can be kept the longest.

Support

- Support learners as they scan for the key words 'Use by' and 'Best before'.
- Use Resource 2 ('Months of the year' chart) to support learners in the second part of the activity.

ESOL

- Check that learners understand the different ways dates are written on labels and packaging. Display some full dates, such as 'December 2007', and '13 October 2008', and demonstrate how they can be written.
- Check learners are familiar with abbreviations for months. Resource 2 may be helpful.

TIP

Remind learners of the UK convention for writing dates – day first, then month.

ACTIVITY 2

Read and understand dates on food labels

Introduce the fridge clear-out activity on Resource 3, explaining that the task is to check the Use by dates on the food items in the fridge and sort the foods into three categories:

- items to keep
- items to use today
- items to throw away.

Point out that for the purpose of the activity, 'today's date' is 4th July.

Support

- For the sorting task, cut the items apart so that learners can physically move them into the three categories.
- Learners may find it easier to look for all the 'use today' items first, before turning their focus to 'throw away' items. Encourage learners to check through the remaining 'keep' items to make sure that no mistakes have been made.

ESOL

Make sure the learners understand the three categories. (These are colour-coded on the page using a traffic light system – red for danger, orange for caution and green for safe.)

Where do you normally find the Use by date on a product?

What would happen if you ate food that was going bad?

Do you have any out-of-date items in your fridge or cupboard?

Action

- Provide learners with a selection of food items to sort into date order. This will give practice at scanning for Use by and Best before dates as well as reading and understanding dates in different formats.
- Ask learners to sort out their fridges and store cupboards at home to see if they have any out-of-date items that need to be thrown away.

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RESOURCE 1

Food labels have 'Best before' and 'Use by' dates that tell you if the food is still good to eat. Here are some examples.

a

Keep refrigerated	Display until: 16 JUL	Use by: 17 JUL


b

Cooks in	Suitable for	Display until	Use by	Product
15	*	07 Apr	08 Apr	400 g
minutes	home freezing	Keep refrigerated		e
				Weight

c

Best before: See below
JAN08
L187B3

d

12 minutes	V	*	KEEP REFRIGERATED	210 g	 5 010204 03974
Oven	Vegetarian	Suitable for home freezing	08 Oct 09 Oct	e	
			Display until Use by	Weight	

e

Best before: End	Nov 2008
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f

Use by (day/month)
01/08

Months of the year			
01	Jan	January	31 days
02	Feb	February	28 days (29 in leap years)
03	Mar	March	31 days
04	Apr	April	30 days
05	May	May	31 days
06	Jun	June	30 days
07	Jul	July	31 days
08	Aug	August	31 days
09	Sep	September	30 days
10	Oct	October	31 days
11	Nov	November	30 days
12	Dec	December	31 days

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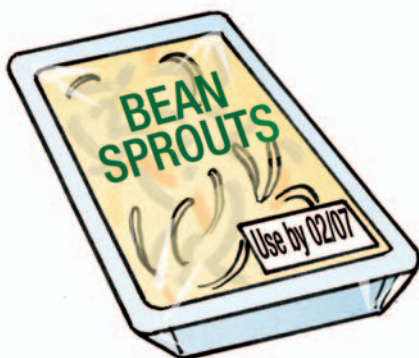
Today's date
JULY 4



Keep it

Use it today

Throw it away



There are no audio scripts for this theme.

ACTIVITY 1 / Resource 1

- **A:** Unsafe to eat after the date: **a, b, d** and **f** (Use by dates)
- **B:** Not such good quality after the date: **c** and **e** (Best before dates)
- Use by dates are as follows:
 - **a** 17th July this year
 - **b** 8th April this year
 - **d** 9th October this year
 - **f** 1st August this year.
- Order of Use by dates is as follows:
 - **b** 8th April this year
 - **a** 17th July this year
 - **f** 1st August this year
 - **d** 9th October this year.

ACTIVITY 2 / Resource 3

Keep it: pate, yogurt, milk, fresh orange juice, stir fry

Use it today: prawns

Throw it away: coleslaw, bean sprouts, fresh cream