



You reach into the pantry for a bottle of mayo and then you notice that the “**Best By**” date was 2 months ago. Do you have to throw it away or can you still use it?

The milk you just poured into your child’s glass has a “**Sell By**” date on it from 3 days ago? Do you need to be worried?

### **What exactly do those dates mean on your food?**

#### **Use-By, Best if Used By, Best By, Best Before:**

These dates are generally found on products such as salad dressings, mustard, mayo and peanut butter. The manufacturer voluntarily puts dates on the containers to tell you how long the food will remain at its absolute highest quality. It is not a safety indicator. If you have been storing these products safely you can still use them well beyond the date listed.

#### **Sell By:**

These dates are found on meat, milk, poultry and seafood. It is recommended you purchase these types of foods before the “Sell By” date but you can still store these at home if you follow safe storage procedures. Milk that has been properly refrigerated can be used for about a week after the “Sell By” date.

#### **Expires On:**

This label is one you should follow closely. It label will be on products such as like baby food and formula. The federal government regulates these products and you should follow these dates closely.

#### **Packing codes:**

Often you will find several numbers, letters and dates together. These numbers assist grocers in rotating their stock or taking inventory. They are not an indicator of quality or safety.

- Most importantly use common sense! If a food product looks, smells or tastes different discard immediately.
- If a container looks damaged or has been improperly stored – discard immediately.
- When in doubt – throw it out!
- If you would like more information on food storage there are several websites that provide specific information on food safety and preparation

[www.stilltasty.com](http://www.stilltasty.com)    [www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/](http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/)    [www.foodsafety.gov/](http://www.foodsafety.gov/)

If you feel you have symptoms of food poisoning or have any questions you can contact the Nebraska Regional Poison Center at (402) 955-5555 in the Omaha area or toll-free at 1-800-222-1222 (in Nebraska and Wyoming) The Nebraska Regional Poison Center is sponsored by the Nebraska Medical Center and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.