

Reading

food labels

Eating well involves choosing a variety of foods which are low in saturated fat and salt, plus foods which are high in fibre such as wholegrain bread and cereals, legumes, fruits and vegetables.

There are many foods which fit this description, but finding them amongst the vast array of foods available in the supermarket can often be difficult. However, there is a way.

Learn how to read food labels!

All food manufacturers must include certain details on labels, such as ingredients and food additives, 'use-by' date, name of manufacturer and the country in which it was made. By reading these labels, you will be able to judge where the food fits into your eating pattern.

The labels on all packaged foods must contain the following information:

- Name of the food.
- Name and business address of the manufacturer or importer.
- Name of the country the food came from.
- A list of ingredients in order of weight from greatest to smallest amount (including added water).
- The percentage of the key or 'characterising' ingredient of the food (eg: in strawberry yoghurt, strawberries are the key or 'characterising' ingredient).
- Warnings about the presence of major allergens, no matter how small the amount.
- Nutrition Information panel.
- A 'use-by' date (ie: if a food must be consumed before a certain date for health and safety reasons) or 'best before' date (ie: if the shelf life is less than two years).

The Ingredient List and the Nutrition Information panel are two sections of the food label which are very useful in making healthy food choices.

The Ingredient List

All packaged foods must have an ingredient list on their labels. All ingredients are listed in descending order by weight (ie: from the greatest to the smallest amount), so you can work out roughly how much of the ingredient the food contains. You can use this information to help you decide whether or not you want to buy the food.

Percentage labelling

Some packaged foods show the percentage of the key ingredients or components in the food product. For example in strawberry yoghurt, strawberries are a key ingredient, so the percentage of strawberries is indicated. In some cases, such as plain milk or bread, there are no key or 'characterising' ingredients.

The Nutrition Information panel

Most packaged foods must now have a Nutrition Information panel, regardless of whether any nutrition claims (eg: 'reduced fat' or 'low salt') are made. Exceptions include small packages and foods like herbs and spices, tea, coffee as well as foods sold unpackaged or made and packaged at the point of sale.

Nutrition Information panels provide information on:

- Energy (kilojoules/calories)
- Protein
- Total fat and saturated fat
- Total carbohydrate and sugars (including 'added sugar' and sugar that is present naturally)
- Sodium

The Nutrition Information panel provides very useful information that can be used to decide whether a food is suitable for someone with diabetes.

See page 3 for a sample Nutrition Information panel plus an explanation about how it can help you to make better choices.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
SERVINGS PER PACKAGE: 3		
SERVING SIZE: 150G		
	Quantity per Serving	Quantity per 100g
Energy	608 kJ	405 kJ
Protein	4.2g	2.8g
Fat, total	7.4g	4.9g
– saturated	4.5g	3.0g
Carbohydrate		
– total	18.6g	12.4g
– sugars	18.6g	12.4g
Sodium	90mg	60mg

Serving size

This is the average serving size of the product as determined by the manufacturer. However, this may not be the same as the serving you have.

Fat – total

This is the total amount of fat in the product. It includes the amount of fat from the three main types of fat: saturated, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated.

Fat – saturated

Use the figure per 100g, compare similar products and pick the one with less saturated fat.

Per 100g

100g is a useful standard to compare products, eg: which is lower in fat. Use this information when choosing products.

Sodium (salt)

Choose, where possible, products with reduced or no added salt.

Carbohydrate

Total

This includes both sugars and starches in food. If you are counting carbohydrates you can use this figure to work out how much carbohydrate is in the food.

Sugars

This tells you how much of the total carbohydrate is sugar. This includes ‘added sugar’ as well as naturally occurring sugars like lactose (milk sugar) and fructose (fruit sugar). Sugar content alone will not predict the effect of the food on your blood glucose level.

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