

Understanding Food Labels

Nutrition Information Panel

All food packages (except food with little to no kilojoule content such as spices) are required to display a nutrition information panel.

Understanding food labels helps you identify useful information to make shopping for healthy foods easier.

TIP: You can also use the label to help you lose weight by limiting foods that are high in energy per serve.

What to Look For:

- Snacks; check energy, sugar, fat and salt.
- Dairy products; check energy, fat, and salt.
- Breads and cereals; check fibre and salt

Nutrition Information

Servings per package – 16
Serving size – 30g (2/3 cup)

	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	432kJ	1441kJ
Protein	2.8g	9.3g
Fat		
Total	0.4g	1.2g
Saturated	0.1g	0.3g
Carbohydrate		
Total	18.9g	62.9g
Sugars	3.5g	11.8g
Fibre	6.4g	21.2g
Sodium	65mg	215mg

Total Fat ▶

Generally choose foods with less than **10g per 100g**.

For milk, yogurt and icecream, choose less than **2g per 100g**.

For cheese, choose less than **15g per 100g**.

Saturated Fat ▶

Aim for the lowest, per 100g.

Less than 3g per 100g is best.

Other names for ingredients high in saturated fat: Animal fat/oil, beef fat, butter, chocolate, milk solids, coconut, coconut oil/milk/cream, copha, cream, ghee, dripping, lard, suet, palm oil, sour cream, vegetable shortening.

Fibre ▶

Not all labels include fibre.

Choose breads and cereals with **3g or more per serve**

Ingredients: Cereals (76%) (wheat, oatbran, barley), psyllium husk (11%), sugar, rice, malt extract, honey, salt, vitamins.

Ingredients ▲

Listed from greatest to smallest by weight. Use this to check the first three ingredients for items high in saturated fat, sodium (salt) or added sugar.

◀ 100g Column and Serving Size

If comparing nutrients in similar food products **use the per 100g column**. If calculating how much of a nutrient, or how many kilojoules you will actually eat, use the per serve column. But check whether your portion size is the same as the serve size.

Energy

Check how many kJ per serve to decide how much is a serve of a 'discretionary' food, which has 600kJ per serve.

Sugars

Avoiding sugar completely is not necessary, but try to avoid larger amounts of added sugars. If sugar content per 100g is more than 15g, check that sugar (or alternative names for added sugar) is not listed high on the ingredient list.

Other names for added sugar: Dextrose, fructose, glucose, golden syrup, honey, maple syrup, sucrose, malt, maltose, lactose, brown sugar, caster sugar, maple syrup, raw sugar, sucrose.

◀ Sodium (Salt)

Choose lower sodium options among similar foods. **Food with less than 400mg per 100g are good, and less than 120mg per 100g is best.**

Other names for high salt ingredients:

Baking powder, celery salt, garlic salt, meat/yeast extract, monosodium glutamate, (MSG), onion salt, rock salt, sea salt, sodium, sodium ascorbate, sodium bicarbonate, sodium nitrate/nitrite, stock cubes, vegetable salt.

Nutrition

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Nutrient Claims

Manufacturers often make claims on labels to emphasize a particular positive health nutrient (e.g. low in salt). These claims must comply with an industry code of practice, so that a claim means the same thing no matter what product it is displayed on. Example claims are in the table below. If you notice the product has a nutrient claim - don't straight away jump to the conclusion that it is healthy. A tub of yoghurt might claim to be "low-fat" but is filled with sugar instead! Or a product may say "reduced salt" - but even in its reduced form it is still a very high source of sodium and should be had in moderation.

Nutrient claims	
Good source of fibre	4g (or more) fibre per serve
Reduced fat	At least 25% less fat than the full fat product
Low fat	3g of total fat (or less) per 100g of food or 1.5g fat per 100ml of liquid food
Light or Lite	At least 25% less energy, fats, carbohydrate or sugar content
Reduced Salt	At least 25% less sodium/salt than the full salt product
No added sugar	The only sugars present in the food are those naturally occurring such as fructose in fruit and lactose in dairy products. No additional sugar is added.
Low salt/sodium	120mg (or less) of salt/sodium per 100g

Food additives

Food additives are added in small amounts to foods to reduce nutrient loss, preserve the food, or make the food more appealing in colour, texture, flavour or appearance.

Although all have undergone testing and been approved by Food Standards Australia New Zealand it is better to avoid additives whenever possible, particularly some more than others. Here is a list of SMG Health's top 4 that are best avoided:

1. Sodium nitrate (251) and nitrite (250): used as a preservative and to keep the pinkish colour of meats.
2. Tartrazine (102) and Sunset yellow FCF (110): Common food colourings used in cereal, desserts, beverages and lollies.
3. Butylated hydroxytoluene (320) and hydroxyanisole (321): antioxidants used in beer, crackers and muesli bars.
4. Brilliant Blue (133) & Indigotine (132): food colouring found baked goods, icecream, snacks and lollies.

Shopping tips ...

that save your hip pocket and the earth:

When you pick up a product from the supermarket looking at how much fat, salt and sugar is in it can be complemented by asking yourself these quick and simple questions:

- **Is it in a packet and does it need to be?**
Fresh, unprocessed whole foods are always best
- **Can I make this at home myself?**
Not only can you save money - but you will know exactly what has gone into it.
- **Is this in season?**
Fresh foods taste better and are cheaper when they are in season.
- **Was this on my shopping list?**
Always make a shopping list before you go to the supermarket to prevent unnecessary purchases and save you from forgetting things and making repeated trips to the shops.

'Use By' vs. 'Best Before' date

'Best Before': Foods with a shelf life of less than two years have a 'best before' date. It may still be safe to use these foods after this date, but they have lost quality and some nutritional value.

'Use by': Foods that should not be consumed after a certain period of time for health and safety reasons have a 'used by' date and should be consumed by this date.