

Understanding Food Labels



Learning how to understand and use the Nutrition Information Panel (NIP) on the packet can help you make healthier eating choices and identify nutrient-dense foods for a healthy diet. Here are some tips for making the most of the information on food labels.

What is the ingredients list?

The 'ingredient list' on food labels lists ingredients used in the product in order of size, from greatest to smallest. It can help to identify sources of fat, sugar and salt, and how many extra ingredients have been added. The shorter the ingredients list and more ingredients that you can recognise - the better!

Understanding nutrition claims

Some labels tell you what percentage of the recommended daily intake is provided by one serve of the product. This helps you to work out how the food fits into a diet balanced. The label may make a number of nutrition claims such as 'gluten free', 'low fat', 'reduced salt' or 'high fibre'. These mean the product meets strict criteria set by the government. But just because a product can make a nutritional claim doesn't mean it is healthy. For example, a product that is labelled 'low fat' may have a high sugar content and more kilojoules than another similar product.

What do you look for on Nutrition Information Panels (NIPs)?

Learn a few simple label reading tips to choose healthy foods and drinks, for yourself. You can also use the NIP to help you lose weight by limiting foods that are high in energy per serve. This table is a guide for what to look for on the NIP on food labels. To make things simple, when it comes to the **3Ss** (saturated fat, sugar and sodium) - less is best!

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	
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.			

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**

◀ 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.

What about Health Stars?

Health Stars are a front of pack labelling system designed to identify healthier choices within broad food categories - the more stars, the healthier the product! Packaged foods are rated at between ½ and 5 stars. The rating is calculated according to ingredients that increase the risk of obesity and contribute to other chronic diseases.



Getting to know what's in the foods you eat is a great way to take charge of your health. Remember, if you have any questions you can always call the manufacturer - their number is usually listed on the food packaging.

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