

Reading Food Labels

Understanding how to read food labels can help you make healthy food choices. Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) regulates food labelling in Australia. Most packaged food and drink must have a nutrition information panel. Exceptions include those in very small packages, some baked products and take-away food.

Nutrition Information Panel

The nutrition information panel provides a detailed description of the food or drink. It is useful for comparing products and choosing healthier options.

The nutrition information panel contains the following information:

- Serving size & number of servings per package
- Nutrients within the listed serving size and per 100g:
 - Energy (kilojoules/calories)
 - Protein
 - Total fat and Saturated fat
 - Total Carbohydrate and Sugars
 - Sodium (Salt)
 - Fibre (may not always be present)
- Warning about the presence of food allergens e.g. nuts, gluten, milk etc.

Nutritional Claims and what they mean

Food labels can display nutrition claims which may be misleading. The nutrition information panel is the best place to look to decide if the food is a good choice.

Below are some common claims and what they mean.

- **Low Fat:** Contains less than 3g fat per 100g.
- **Diet:** The product has been artificially sweetened.
- **Reduced Fat/Salt:** Contains at least 25% less fat or salt than the regular product.
- **Light OR Lite:** May be used to describe texture, colour, flavour. The product does not necessarily contain less fat or sugar.
- **No Added Sugar:** No sugar is added to the product during production. The product could still be naturally high in sugar eg. fruit juice or dried fruit.
- **All natural:** Generally indicates no artificial colourings, flavourings or preservatives have been added to the product. It may still be high in fat, sugar and/or salt.

Ingredients list

The ingredients list describes what is in the food. Ingredients are listed in order from the most to the least quantity. If fat, sugar or salt are listed within the first three ingredients, consider choosing a different product.

Fat, sugar and salt can be described in different ways, look out for the following;

Fat	Sugar	Salt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beef fat • butter • cream • coconut • coconut oil • copha • hydrogenated oils • margarine • milk solids • palm oil • vegetable oil • dripping • lard • oil • palm oil • sour cream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brown sugar • concentrated fruit juice • corn syrup • dextrose • fructose • glucose • golden syrup • sucrose • honey • lactose • maltose • mannitol • maple syrup • molasses • raw sugar • sucrose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • baking powder • celery/garlic salt • glutamate • mineral salts • monosodium glutamate; MSG • rock salt • sea salt • sodium • sodium bicarbonate • stock

Example ingredients list for a cereal product

Cereal is the ingredient in the highest quantity as it is listed first, however only makes up 44% of the product.

Sugar is the second ingredient, indicating it is high in sugar. Look for an alternative product.

Ingredients: Cereals (44%)(wheat flour, oatmeal, maize flour), sugar, wheat gluten, molasses, salt, barley malt extract, minerals (calcium carbonate, iron), mineral salt (sodium bicarbonate), natural colour (paprika, turmeric), vitamins (vitamin C, niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate).

Contains gluten containing cereals.

May contain traces of peanuts and/or tree nuts.

Salt has been added to this product.

All major allergens must be declared on the food label. If you have specific dietary requirements, discuss with your Dietitian.

Reading Nutrition Information Panels

Understanding how to read nutrition information panels, can make it easier to choose healthier options. Don't forget to check your portion sizes.

Serving Size

This is the average serving size of the product determined by the manufacturer. This may not be the same as the serving size you consume.

Per 100g

100g is a useful standard to compare products. Use this information when choosing products to decide which is the healthier option.

Sugar

- Aim for 15g per 100g or less

Nutrition Information		
Servings per package: 1		
Serving size: 35g		
	Per Serve	Per 100g
Energy	501kJ	1430kJ
Protein	3.5g	10g
Fat	0.4g	1g
Saturated fat	0.2g	0.5g
Carbohydrate		
Total	25.3g	72.2g
Sugar	7.5g	21.5g
Fibre	3.4g	9.7g
Sodium	185mg	535mg

Fat

- Total fat aim for 10g per 100g or less
- Saturated fat aim for 3g/100g

• Exception:

- Milk & yoghurt: aim for 2g/100g or less
- Cheese: aim for 15g/100g or less

Fibre

- Choose the product highest in fibre per 100g
- Aim for at least 7.5g per 100g OR 3g per serve
- Aim for 30g of fibre per day

- *Exception:* Some products such as dairy foods do not naturally contain fibre

Sodium (Salt)

- Aim for 120mg per 100g or less
- Limit foods which contain more than 400mg per 100g

For further information regarding food labels or for specific dietary requirements such as coeliac disease, food allergies or intolerances, contact your Dietitian.