

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 on the supermarket shelves can often be difficult. However, there is a way.

Learn how to read food labels!

The labels on all packaged foods must contain the following information. By reading these labels, you will be able to judge where the food fits into your eating pattern:

- 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
- The percentage of the key or 'characterising' ingredient of the food
- 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

All packaged foods must have an ingredient list on their labels. All ingredients are listed in descending order by weight (ie: the ingredient that weighs the most is listed first and the ingredient that weighs the least is listed last). This allows you to work out roughly how much of the ingredient the food contains, which can 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.

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. Look for the Ingredient List and the Nutrition Information Panel to help you to make healthy choices.



NUTRITION INFORMATION		
SERVINGS PER PACKAGE		
SERVING SIZE: 150G		
	Qty per Serving	Qty
Energy	608 kJ	1
Protein	4.2g	4'
Fat, total	7.4g	
saturated	4.5	

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Percentage (%) daily intake

Some manufacturers may choose to include information about the contribution of a serving of their product to your total daily nutrient intake (eg: 1 slice provides 12% of your daily fibre needs). This is known as ‘% daily intake’. Use this as a guide only as your daily intake may be higher or lower depending on your energy needs.

Nutrition claims

To attract the shopper’s attention, food manufacturers may make a nutrition claim on their packaging such as ‘low fat’, ‘high fibre’ or ‘reduced salt’. Rather than relying on these claims to make a choice, refer to the Nutrition Information Panel to assess whether the product is a healthy option.

The Nutrition Information Panel

Most packaged foods must have a Nutrition Information Panel. 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
- Dietary fibre (only appears if a claim is made about the fibre or sugar content of the food, eg: ‘high fibre’ or ‘low sugar’).

The Nutrition Information Panel provides very useful information that can be used to decide whether a food is suitable for someone with diabetes and for choosing the better option from a range of similar products.

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

Serving size	NUTRITION INFORMATION		Per 100g	
<p>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. Use this as a guide only.</p>	SERVINGS PER PACKAGE: 3		<p>100g is a useful standard to compare products eg: which is lower in fat? Use this information when choosing products.</p>	
	SERVING SIZE: 150G			
		Qty per Serving		Qty per 100g
	Energy	608 kJ		405kJ
	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		
Fat	Carbohydrate	Sodium (salt)		
<p>Total: This is the total amount of fat in the product. It includes the amount of fat from the four main types of fat: saturated, trans, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated. Fat is very high in energy (kilojoules/ calories) therefore choosing the product lower in total fat is important for those wanting to lose weight.</p> <p>Saturated: Use the figure per 100g, compare similar products and pick the one with less saturated fat. It is important to limit saturated fat intake for heart health.</p>	<p>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. Compare your serving size to the average serving size suggested by the manufacturer. Use the total carbohydrate figure in the 'per serving' column to determine how much carbohydrate you are eating.</p> <p>Sugars: This tells you how much of the total carbohydrate is sugar. This includes 'added sugar' as well as naturally occurring sugars from fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose) if they are ingredients in the food. Remember it is total carbohydrate that affects blood glucose levels, not just sugar. The amount of sugar in a food is not a very useful guide to decide whether it is a healthy food.</p>	<p>Compare similar products and choose the one with the lower sodium content per 100g. It is important to reduce sodium intake for heart health.</p>		

How to find healthy foods when shopping

Most of us make up our mind about which foods we are going to buy when we're in the supermarket. To decide if a food is a healthy choice, ask:

- **Is the food lower in fat, especially saturated fat?**

Tip: Healthier options have less than 5g total fat per 100g or 5–10g total fat per 100g if saturated fat is less than 1/2 total fat.

- **Is the food lower in salt (sodium)?**

Tip: Healthier options have less than 450mg sodium per 100g. Low sodium foods have less than 120mg sodium per 100g.

- **Is the food high in fibre?**

Tip: Healthier options have more than 3g dietary fibre per 100g. Remember that many foods do not have dietary fibre listed in the Nutrition Information Panel.

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These guidelines can be applied to many but not all foods. For example, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated margarines that are healthier options will have far more than 10g total fat per 100g. On the other hand, it is beneficial to look for breakfast cereals and breads that have even more than 5g fibre per 100g.

For more information about food product label reading, contact your State or Territory Organisation to purchase a copy of the *Healthy Shopping Guide*.

Keep an eye out for the Glycemic Index Tested Symbol

To help people identify healthy low GI foods while shopping, the University of Sydney, Diabetes Australia and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation joined forces to develop the easily identifiable GI Symbol. The Symbol indicates that a food has had its GI measured using the Australian Standard to ensure its accuracy, and that it meets strict nutrient criteria, consistent with Australia's Dietary Guidelines ie: be low in saturated fat, moderate in sodium and where appropriate a source of dietary fibre. They must also contain at least 10 grams of carbohydrate per serve. Check for the word 'low' near the GI Symbol for low GI foods.



A broad selection of foods and beverages with the Symbol* are available in your local supermarket.

* It is not mandatory for food companies to put the GI rating on food labels.

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