

INTERPRETING FOOD LABELS

Knowing how to correctly read a food label is important for being able to make healthy choices. Understanding all the information on the food label can help you to figure out the nutritional value, and work out what is a healthier option.

The nutrition information on these labels will help you to recognise which food groups they fall under, and which have more nutrients and dietary fibre, and less trans fats, cholesterol and sodium.

ELEMENTS OF THE FOOD LABEL

These are the main things you will see on a food label:

- + Name and brand of the product
- + Nutrition information panel
- + Ingredients list
- + Manufacturing and expiry dates
- + Manufacturer and distributor details
- + The net weight of the product
- + Nutrition claims and allergen warnings
- + Use and storage details

THE NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Serving per pack – 20

Serving size – 40 g (1 metric cup)

	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	650 kJ (103 kcal)	1630 kJ (344 kcal)
Protein	8.7 g	21.8 g
Fat		
Total	1.2 g	3.0 g
Saturated fat	0.2 g	0.5 g
Trans fat	0 g	0 g
Cholesterol	0 mg	0 mg
Carbohydrates		
Total	26.1 g	65.2 g
Dietary fibre	2.1 g	5.3 g
Sugars	9.7 g	24.2 g
Sodium	140 mg	350 mg

Ingredients: Cereals (51%) (wheat flour, oatmeal, maize flour), sugar, wheat protein, maltodextrin, molasses, oat fibre, vegetable gum, salt, barley malt extract, natural flavours, natural colours, raising agents, minerals (calcium carbonate, iron, zinc oxide), vitamins (niacin, vitamin B6, riboflavin, folate).

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SERVING PER PACK
& SERVING SIZES

←
ENERGY & 100G COLUMN

←
TOTAL FAT CONTENT

←
TOTAL CARBOHYDRATE CONTENT

←
SODIUM

←
INGREDIENTS LIST



SERVING PER PACK AND SERVING SIZES

Serving per pack shows how many servings a package or container contains.

Serving sizes are usually indicated as household measures such as cups and metric measures like grams and millilitres. When checking the panel, consider how the serving size compares with the actual amount of food to be eaten. Adjust servings if they are not the same.

ENERGY AND 100G COLUMN

Check how many kilojoules or calories there are per serving and per 100g of the food item. It can make grocery shopping easier, by assessing which foods item have fewer calories/kilojoules, or grams of fat and sugars.

TOTAL FAT

The general rule is to choose foods with a total fat of 10g per 100g. For saturated fat, go for less than 3g per 100g. These are the ingredients which contribute to the total fat content of a product: animal fat/oil, beef fat, butter, chocolate, milk solids, palm oil/olein, coconut oil/cream/milk, ghee, copha, lard, sour cream, suet, vegetable/soybean oil, vegetable shortening.

TOTAL CARBOHYDRATE, SUGARS AND DIETARY FIBRE

Total carbohydrates include the sugars and the dietary fibre in the product. Ideally, look for no more than 15g per 100g of sugars in a product. If it has a higher content, check in the ingredients list for hidden sugars such as dextrose, dextrin, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, maple syrup, agave syrup, golden syrup, honey, sucrose, molasses, malt extract, maltose, maltodextrin, lactose, raw sugar, caster sugar, brown sugar, coconut sugar, cane sugar, invert sugar, or fruit juice concentrate.

For the dietary fibre, select products such as breads, cereal, muesli, or oats that have 3g or more per serving.

SODIUM

Sodium helps with prolonging the shelf life of products. The best food items to select have 120mg or less per 100g while those with <400mg is still acceptable. Look out for these items in the ingredients list so you know where your sodium is coming from: sodium bicarbonate, sodium ascorbate, sodium nitrate, monosodium glutamate or MSG, baking powder, sea/rock salt, onion/garlic/celery/vegetable salt, meat/yeast extract, or stock cubes.

INGREDIENTS LIST

This section will give you the full picture of what is in the food item that you are buying. The ingredients are listed in descending order by weight, so check the first 3-5 items in the list to see if they are major sources of sugars, fats and sodium.

