

Reading Food Labels

Eating well involves choosing a variety of foods that are low in saturated and trans fats, low in salt and high in dietary fibre. Food labels carry useful information to help you make choices about the food you buy and eat. The nutritional panel of the label will tell you:

- Nutritional values
- The ingredients of the item
- The percentage of the Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) of particular nutrients
- If the item contains additives, normally identified by numbers

Together, all this information allows you to compare similar products and choose the one that best suits your dietary needs.

The list of ingredients

All ingredients must be listed in decreasing order by weight, including water. The ingredient listed first is present in the largest amount and the ingredient listed last is present in the least amount. The list of ingredients assists you to identify fats, sugar and salt in foods. For example if you are buying orange juice, you need to make sure that oranges are near the top of the ingredients list.

Information for allergy sufferers

Common food ingredients or components of an ingredient that can cause an adverse reaction in some people must be declared. Peanuts, soybeans, nuts, gluten, seafood, milk and eggs are all examples of common allergens that may be contained in processed food.

The Nutrition Panel

The Nutrition Panel is useful to compare the nutrient content of different varieties of similar foods.

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An Example of a nutritional panel from lite milk:

	Per 250ml serve	Per 100ml
Energy	530kJ (128 cal)	212kJ (51cal)
Protein	9.8g	3.9g
Fat		
Total	3.5g	1.4g
Saturated	2.3g	0.9g
Carbohydrate		
Total	13.8g	5.5g
Sugars	13.8g	5.5g
Sodium	143mg	57mg

- **Serving size**

This gives you the average serving size of the product. Remember this may not be the appropriate serving size for you. The serving size of a particular product is governed by the manufacturer and may be different among different products.

- **Per 100g**

This allows you to easily compare different products.

- **Fat**

The amount of fat contained in the food per 100g enables you to compare fat content from a range of products. We should choose foods low in fat, which is less than 3g of fat per 100g of the food product. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats such as olive oil, avocado, fish and walnuts are the most "heart-friendly".

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- **Carbohydrate**

This figure includes carbohydrate sourced from both added sugars and starches. You should aim for the sugar content in the food to be low compared with the total carbohydrate content.

- **Sodium**

Sodium is another name for salt. Salt is used quite liberally in most processed foods such as deli meats, frozen dinners and canned food. We should select those foods that are labelled "reduced salt" or "no added salt". The best choices are those food products that contain less than 120 mg of sodium per 100g of food.

- **Dietary fibre**

Foods such as wholegrain bread, most breakfast cereals, fruit and vegetables are good sources of dietary fibre. A breakfast cereal containing at least 9g of fibre per 100g of food product is a good choice. A healthy diet includes consuming at least 30g of fibre every day.

- **Percentage labelling**

Packaged foods will sometimes show the percentage of the key or characterising ingredient. For example, "Roasted Capsicum and Tomato Sauce" must state the percentage of capsicum and tomato used as an ingredient in the sauce.



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Date marking

Foods with a shelf life less than two years must have a 'best before' date. It may still be safe to eat those foods after that date but you can expect some loss in nutritional value and product quality.

Those foods that must be consumed by a certain date for health and safety reasons contain a 'use by' date. Bread is an exception which will be labelled with a 'Baked on' date as its shelf life is less than seven days.

Be Aware!

Fat, sugar and salt are sometimes added to food during manufacturing either for functional reasons such as softening food, making it creamy or for improved taste. Be aware as sometimes when items are low in fat they have extra sugar or salt added for flavour. Fat, sugar and salt can also come in many disguises. The following table will help you make better food choices. If the ingredient list has any of the items below on it towards the beginning of the list, the food is very likely to be an unhealthy choice.

Fat	Sugar	Salt
Beef fat	Brown sugar	Baking powder
Coconut	Corn syrup	Booster
Coconut oil	Dextrose	Celery salt
Copha	Disaccharides	Garlic Salt
Palm oil	Glucose	Meat or yeast extract
Toasted	Sucrose	Mono-sodium glutamate
Oven fried/baked	Malt	Sodium bicarbonate
Lard	Mono-saccharides	Stock cubes

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Nutritional claims – what do they mean?

Do not be misled by labelling tricks and traps. The term 'light' or 'lite' may not mean the product is low in fat. In fact, the terms 'light' or 'lite' may refer to the texture, colour or taste of the product. For example, Light Olive Oil refers to the oil's light flavour compared to regular olive oil not its total fat content.

- **'No added sugar'** means no refined sugars have been added, however, the product may still contain natural sugars such as fruit sugars (fructose) and milk sugars (lactose). Look at the sugar content to see if you are making a wise choice.
- **Toasted or oven baked** means the product has been cooked in oil or fat but not fried, yet still may be high in fat. Review the total fat content before making your product selection.
- **Reduced fat** on a label does not necessarily mean the product is low in fat. What it means is the product contains an overall lower amount of fat than the original product for example cheese 25% lower in fat.
- **Salt reduced** products contain less than the usual amount of salt found in the same product. This may still mean the product is high in salt, so look for products that contain less than 120 mg salt per 100g.
- **Cholesterol Free or Low Cholesterol** these foods are not necessarily low in fat as they may still have a large amount of saturated fat.



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The Glycemic Index



The GI (glycemic index) symbol means these foods have been scientifically tested to ascertain the effect of each food on blood glucose levels. By choosing low GI foods we are better able to maintain our energy levels throughout the day.

Low GI	Value of 55 or less	Slower and lower rise in blood glucose levels, which leaves us feeling fuller for longer
Moderate GI	Value of 56 to 69	Moderate rise in blood glucose levels
High GI	Value of 70 +	Fast rise in blood sugar levels that can leave us feeling tired or fatigued after the initial 'sugar rush'



The National Heart Foundation Tick

The "National Heart Foundation Tick" is present on foods that have gained approval and meet compliance with the National Heart Foundation Guidelines for total fat, saturated fat, salt, sugar and where appropriate fibre. You may notice the tick on foods such as margarine and cooking oil. This means these foods contain low amounts of saturated fats. It is important to recognise that a product still may comply with the guidelines, yet have not obtained the 'tick'. It is important to read all product labels, tick or no tick to make sure you are purchasing the healthiest option.

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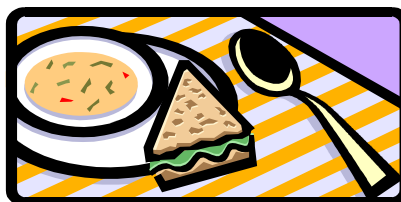
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Your guide to smarter shopping

When out shopping, look at product labels and make your selection based upon the total fat, sodium, fibre and carbohydrate content. We have made some recommendations for you to use as guidelines to enable you to shop smarter.

	Recommendation
Total fat	This should be 10g or less per 100g. A low fat food product has 3g or less per 100g
Sodium (salt)	Sodium content should be 120mg or less per 100g
Fibre	Choose the product with the highest fibre content. Breakfast cereals should have 9g or more per 100g
Low sugar	Sugar content should be less than 10g per 100g



FURTHER INFORMATION

Our outpatient Dietitian is located within the hospital and can also help you with maintaining a healthy weight (increasing or decreasing) and provide a full dietary analysis to measure dietary adequacy. Please call to make an appointment (02) 9487 9581.

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