

Dietetic Department

Patient Information Leaflet (PL)

A Guide to Food Labelling

Patients and Relatives Information



Food labels provide a wide range of information about foods. Understanding them correctly is important to enable us to make healthier food choices. The laws surrounding food labelling changed in December 2014 which has been regularly updated since then. This leaflet will explain what information is contained within food labels and how to interpret and use it to compare different products.

Health Claims on Packets

Health claims must comply with the general rules which include not being false, ambiguous or misleading. Health claims must be authorised and included in the list of authorised health claims in the EU Register before they can be used. Any claims made about the nutrition and health benefits of a product must be based on reliable scientific evidence.

- **‘Light’ or ‘Lite’**

To carry this claim, the product must be at least 30% lower in one typical value (calories or fat) than that manufacturer’s standard version of the product in the same range. It can be surprising to see that there is very little difference in foods that carry the claim and those that don’t. For example, one brand of crisps marketed as ‘light’ may contain the same total fat (or lower) than the standard version of another brand.

- **Low-Fat**

A product containing this claim must contain no more than 3g of fat per 100g of solids (or 1.5g of fat per 100ml for liquids).

- **‘No added sugar’ or ‘unsweetened’**

These claims refer to products where no sugars have been added as ingredients. The presence of these claims on food packaging does not mean that the product is sugar free as it may still contain ingredients that are naturally sweet such as fruit juice or milk. In this case, the label should include “Contains naturally occurring sugars”.

- **Special Claims**

Manufacturers are unable to make specific claims about a product such as its ability to treat, prevent or cure diseases. However, they can state that the product may have general health benefits if there is good quality scientific evidence behind it. Claims that can be made about products are set out in EU legislation e.g.

- Beta-glucans contribute to maintenance of normal blood cholesterol
- Calcium is needed for maintenance of normal bones

There is no need to eat foods labelled as ‘suitable for diabetes’ as these have not been proven to be healthier than standard versions and may be more expensive.

If a nutrition claim is made e.g. high in iron it is compulsory to include information about that nutrient in the nutritional tables found on that product

Nutritional Information

Nutrition		
Typical values	100g contains	Each slice (typically 44g) contains
Energy	985kJ 235kcal	435kJ 105kcal
Fat	1.5g	0.7g
of which saturates	0.3g	0.1g
Carbohydrate	45.5g	20.0g
of which sugars	3.8g	1.7g
Fibre	2.8g	1.2g
Protein	7.7g	3.4g
Salt	1.0g	0.4g

UK manufacturers must provide nutritional information on almost all packaged foods and drinks (this is usually found on the back or side of a packet). Nutrients are listed in a certain order; energy [in kilojoules (kJ) and kilocalories (kcal)], fat, saturated fat, total carbohydrates, sugars, protein and salt. The term 'sodium' is no longer permitted alone unless the equivalent as salt is also given.

The information given **must be per 100g or 100ml** of the food but can also be given per portion or per serving or as a percentage of reference nutrient intakes.

When comparing products remember to look at the nutritional information provided per 100g/100ml as manufacturers may have different opinions on what constitutes a 'suitable serving'

Total Fat and Saturated Fat

- There are two main types of fat in foods: unsaturated and saturated.
- On a food label, fat will be displayed as the total fat content first and then the amount of the total fat that is saturated will be displayed below.
- Try to choose more food and drinks that contain less than 3g of total fat per 100g/100ml and less than 1.5g of saturated fat per 100g/100ml.
- Unsaturated fat (including mono- and poly-unsaturated fat) is a healthier choice than saturated fat but will still contain the same total calories. Try to choose unsaturated fats where possible but aim to lower your total fat intake too.

Carbohydrates and Sugars

- The term carbohydrate is used to describe both starchy foods e.g. rice, potatoes, pasta or flour and also simple carbohydrates e.g. sugars contained within foods. Values for total carbohydrates (sugar + starch) and just sugars appear on food labels.
- It is not compulsory for manufacturers to include information about fibre. However, choosing products containing higher fibre carbohydrates where possible will have additional health benefits. Examples of higher fibre foods include wholegrain varieties of starchy foods, wholewheat pasta, brown rice or simply leaving skins on potatoes.
- If you eat or drink a large amount of sugar it will raise your blood glucose more rapidly compared to starchier foods. Therefore, for maximal glycaemic control and health benefits you should aim to reduce your sugar intake as much as

possible. Higher frequency consumption of sugar will also increase the risk of developing tooth decay.

- Try to choose food and drink that contain **5g of sugar or less per 100g/100ml**.
- Sugar may also be listed as the following on ingredients labels:
Glucose Dextrose Fructose Treacle Brown Sugar
Molasses Lactose Sucrose Maltose Malt Extract
Honey Invert sugar Syrup Cane sugar Unrefined sugar

Salt

- A diet high in salt can cause high blood pressure leading to heart disease or stroke.
- Try to choose food and drinks that contain 0.3g or less of salt per 100g.
- 75% of the salt that we eat comes from pre-packaged foods so check the labels to compare between brands and make the healthiest choice.

Ingredients List

Ingredients must be listed on pre-packaged foods. This list is always in descending order of the amount contained within the product. Therefore, if the first few items in the list are ingredients that are high in fat/sugar than it would be better to swap to a healthier alternative.

Allergen Information

Manufacturers must emphasise 14 major food allergies on ingredients lists:

Cereals containing gluten	Peanuts	Tree Nuts	Fish
Crustaceans e.g. prawns	Soya beans	Milk	Sesame
Molluscs e.g. clams	Mustard	Eggs	Celery
Sulphur dioxide	Lupin		

Where these allergens are not clear from the ingredient list there will be a reference to the allergen next to the ingredient e.g. Casein (milk) or tofu (soya). The way that the 14 allergens are emphasised on ingredients lists varies between manufacturers **from highlighting**, **bold**, *italics*, contrasting text, CAPITALISING TEXT, and underlining.

Use of statements such as 'contains nuts' are no longer allowed except on products that do not have an ingredients list. References to gluten are also no longer allowed; instead, any cereals that contain gluten will be emphasised in the ingredients list e.g. wheat, rye, barley.

Always look for 'may contain' warnings for the potential risk of cross contamination with other allergens.

Reference Intakes

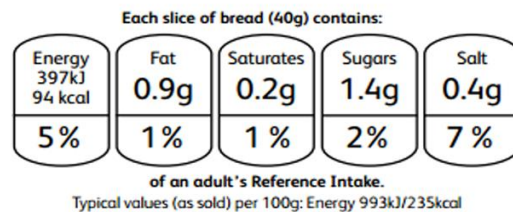
RI means reference intake; this has replaced the term 'recommended daily amount' or RDA. The %RI tells you how much of your daily healthy maximum requirements are contained within the portion. The %RI values used on food labels are based on an average sized adult doing an average amount of physical activity. As individuals vary, they should be used as a guide rather than a target amount.

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
2000kcal	<70g	<20g	90g	6g

Front of Pack and Traffic Light Labelling

Most packed food and drink products show simple nutritional information on the front of the product to enable identification of healthier options. The information provided will tell you:

1. The amount of the nutrient contained within a portion of the food
2. The percentage of your RI this portion will contribute for that nutrient.



Some manufacturers have adopted the traffic light labelling scheme which uses colours to display healthy and less healthy choices.

Red = a high amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt per 100g of food.

These foods should only be eaten occasionally e.g. as a treat

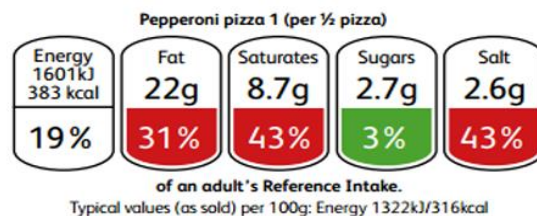
Amber = a medium amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt per 100g of food. **These foods should be included as part of a balanced diet.**

Green = a low amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt per 100g of food. **These foods can be eaten more freely.**

Try to pick more foods with **green** or **amber** lights instead of **red**.

Red doesn't always mean stop. For example, cheese is high in fat but it is also a good source of calcium and protein so can be included in a healthy diet, although in moderation.

To apply the traffic light system to a product, look at the nutritional information provided per 100g for a product and use the grid below to help make a healthier choice.



	Low Per 100g	Medium Per 100g	High Per 100g
Sugars	5g or less	5.1g – 15g	More than 15g
Fat	3g or less	3.1g – 20g	More than 20g
Saturated Fat	1.5g or less	1.6g – 5g	More than 5g
Salt	0.3g or less	0.3g – 1.5g	More than 1.5g

For further information on food labelling please visit:

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/food-labelling.aspx>
- [Food labelling and packaging - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- [Food labels explained | BHF](#)

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