



How to read food labels - June 2010

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Labeling & Packaging

The Food Standards Agency is concerned not only with the food we eat but with packaging and how that is labeled.

The Agency is responsible for making sure that the rules on the safety of materials that come into contact with food are enforced. Food contact materials include the containers food is sold in, the packaging, as well as the articles used to handle food, from food processing machinery to cutlery.

Food labels are a useful source of information, primarily to inform and protect consumers. Much of the Agency's current work on labeling is to help make sure that people get the information they need in an understandable form.

The following information must appear on the label:

- Name of the food
- Ingredients list
- Date Marking - use by, best before
- Claims about the product
- Nutrition labeling
- Misleading descriptions
- Allergen labeling
- Genetically modified foods and ingredients
- Lot marking - in an event of a problem with the product
- Food safety act
- Weight requirement

How to read food labels

Looking at food labels on manufactured food and drink can help when choosing a healthier diet. This information will help you to make sense of the label and to find out which nutritional claims are the best.

Nutrition			GDA Average adult
Typical Values	per 100g	per sausage (approx. 67g)	
Energy Value	910 kJ	610 kJ	
(Calories	220 kcal	145 kcal)	2000 kcal
Protein	15.4 g	10.3 g	45 g
Carbohydrate	5.1 g	3.4 g	230 g
(of which Sugars	4.9 g	3.3 g)	90 g
Fat	15.2 g	10.2 g)	70 g
(of which Saturates	5.6 g	3.8 g)	20 g
Fibre	2.2 g	1.5 g	24 g
Sodium	0.6 g	0.4 g	2.4 g
Salt	1.5 g	1.0 g)	6 g
GDA = Guideline Daily Amounts			

The nutrition information on the label of most manufactured food and drink provides useful data but they are not always easy to understand. Below is the kind of food label you will find on a packet and a guide on how to read it.

SAUSAGE LABEL

1st Column under Typical Values this shows what Nutritional value you will receive in this product and the calories.

2nd column is the amount of grams you will get from each nutrient in every 100 grams (serving size)

3rd column gives you amount of grams in each sausage

4th column gives the breakdown of nutrients you should expect to need (Guideline Daily Amounts) on a 2000 calorie controlled diet.

Decoding the data

Many Nutrition Facts panels also list the number of servings per container, number of calories, calories from fat, and grams of total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrate, fiber, sugar, and protein in a standard serving of the food. Keep in mind that the nutrition information is based on one serving (100g), so if you eat half a serving, all the nutritional values listed need to be cut in half. If a product contains four servings and you eat all of it, then the calories, fat and other nutrients need to be multiplied by four.

What is a Serving?

A serving size is a standard unit of measuring foods e.g. 1 cup of pasta or 3 tablespoons or 100gms

What is a Portion?

A portion could contain many servings! Say you have spaghetti bolognese and you have a large amount of pasta, this could contain several servings of pasta. This is called a portion.

A portion of your morning cereal for example, is however much you pour into your bowl, and a serving is the measurement listed on the box. If the label on your cereal box says $\frac{3}{4}$ cup equals 100 calories and you "free pour" your cereal into a large soup bowl, you have a portion, not a serving. You might have 3 or 4 servings in that bowl. Knowing the difference can help you work out if your portion size is too large!!!

What does it all mean?

ENERGY

KJ (kilojoules)/kcal (kilocalories)

If you are watching your weight you may find it useful to look at the calorie value.

Kilocalories are the same as calories

CARBOHYDRATE

Includes both sugar and starches; the figure for sugars includes both added sugar and natural sugar (e.g.: fruit sugar). Aim to choose foods with small amounts of sugar (1 teaspoon = 4g sugar).

FAT

The label shows the total amount of fat and may provide information on the different types. There are 3 main types of fat:

Saturates (unhealthy)

Monounsaturates (healthier)

Polyunsaturates (best kind)

Try to choose foods that contain the least amount of saturated fats.

SODIUM

Tells you how much salt is in the food - try to have no more than 6g salt (2.4g sodium) a day.

GUIDELINE DAILY AMOUNTS

Often given, as a guide to the amount of calories and fat adults should be eating each day. This allows you to compare how much is in a serving of the food with the total for your daily diet.

Women - 2,000 calories - Fat 70g

Men - 2,500 calories - Fat 95g

So judging if a food is a healthy choice or not depends on how it is cooked and how often you eat it, as well as the nutrition it contains. For a quick check use the following guide:

Healthy if less than

3g fat

1g saturated fat

2g sugars

0.1g sodium

0.5g fibre

Unhealthy if this amount or more

20g fat

5g saturated fats

10g sugars

0.5g sodium

3g fibre

'Per serving' for a complete meal or 'Per 100g' for a snack item such as biscuits or crisps.

Maff - Food Safety Directorate, 1998

Food Ingredients label

Regardless of what else is on the label, there is much valuable information to be learned from food ingredients on labels. All food labels list the ingredients in order of weight: The ingredient with the greatest amount of weight is listed first; the ingredient with the least amount is listed last.

Ingredients

Pork (80%), Bramley Apple Pieces (6%), Dried Diced Apple (4%), Breadcrumbs (Wheat Flour, Water, Yeast, Salt), Egg Powder (Free Range), Water, Antioxidant (Ascorbic acid), Brown Sugar, Preservative (Sodium metabisulphite), Sage, Salt, Spices (Black Pepper, Cinnamon, Cloves, Nutmeg, White Pepper).

Allergy Advice: Contains Egg, Gluten, Sulphites, Wheat.

A few healthy Tips

- Educate yourself about health and ingredients. Remember to be aware of the serving sizes and to know that everything is based on 2,000 - calorie diet
- Limit your intake of Fats, Sugars, and Sodium
- Many 'low fat', processed, or prepared foods have added higher amounts of sodium or sugar to replace the flavour of fats.
- Look at the ingredients you are buying, remember the first ingredient on the list makes up the majority of the food. Make sure it is healthy and nutritious.