BDA The Association of UK Dietitians

Food Fact Sheet

Food labelling

Any food intended for sale must carry accurate, clear and easy to understand information. This fact sheet will look at the nutritional information and help you to understand it.

A food label contains information about the:

- weight of the food
- ingredients it contains
- ingredients that might cause allergy or intolerance
- storage conditions.

The label also has information on parts of the food that are important to health – these are called 'nutrients' and the information about them is called 'nutritional information'.

Nutritional information – back of pack label

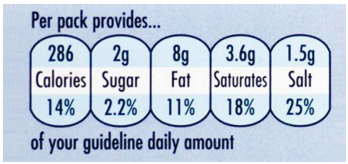
Nutritional information is listed on the back (or side) of a food packet. Manufacturers do not have to put nutritional labelling on their products, but it is included on the majority of pre-packaged foods and it will be mandatory from 13 December 2016. Where nutritional information is listed it must include the following nutrients that are important to health.

These nutrients will be listed on the label as: energy in calories (Kcal) and joules (Kjs) (the European measure of energy); protein; fat; and carbohydrate. The label may also include information on sugars, saturated fat (or saturates), fibre and sodium.

Turn over for a detailed view of a back of pack label.

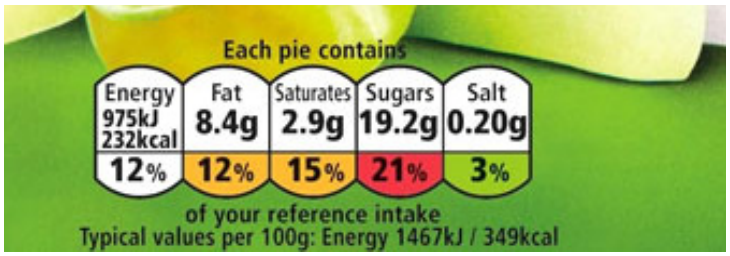
Front of pack labels

To help you make a quick decision, several manufacturers and supermarkets have added a label on the front of the pack. Two different systems have been used on the front of packs of foods, guideline daily amounts (% GDAs) and colour-coded labels.



Guideline daily amounts - %GDAs

These labels list the amount of energy and sugars, fat, saturates and salt in a portion of the food. The label gives the amount in a portion of the food as a percentage of the recommended daily amount for an adult of each nutrient. This wil start to be replaced by reference intake (RI) which is the European measure of requirements.



Colour coded label

These labels use a traffic light colour to indicate whether the food is high, medium or low for the amount of energy and sugars, fat, saturates and salt in a portion of food.

Take care - both labels refer to a portion size that may be smaller than you are eating e.g. the label may refer to one biscuit but they come in packets of four, so make sure you read carefully and multiply the information if you are eating more than the portion size stated.

Be careful when choosing a food that provides a high % of your daily intake of any nutrient. Try to choose foods that show green or amber for the majority of the 'front of pack' nutrients. If a food contains a red label try to limit the number of times you eat this food.

All major UK supermarkets have agreed to use one consistent front of pack label on all own brand products. This new label will soon start to appear on foods.

Summary

The nutritional information on a food label is there to help you understand what is in the food that you are eating. This can help you make choices that will affect your health. The new consistent food labelling system will make it easier for you to compare foods and make sure you are getting a healthy balanced diet.

Labelling law has changed and companies have been given two years to implement (2012-14). New format labels will start to appear on products soon.

Further information: Food Fact Sheets on other topics including Carbohydrates, Fat, Healthy Eating, Salt, and Sugar are available at: **www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts**

Energy

Will be listed as Kilo Joules (KJ) and Kilo Calories (Kcals). Joules are the measure of energy used in Europe - they are the metric equivalent of calories (like kilogrammes (kg) is the metric equivalent of pounds (lb) when looking at weight). Although we say 'calories' in the UK we are technically referring to Kilo Calories. You will see these values listed as Kcals and Kjs.

1 kilo calorie = 4.2 kilo joules

Fat

The total amount of fat is important to our health. All types of fat contain the same amount of energy.

Saturates

This is the term used in labelling for saturated fat (sometimes called 'sat fat'). In the UK, our diets are too high in saturated fat (from lard, butter, fats on meat and fatty meat products, pastries, cakes, biscuits, full-fat dairy foods and take-aways), and it is this type of fat that causes a rise in cholesterol levels. Raised levels of cholesterol are linked to heart disease so we need to try and eat less saturates. The label may also show how much of the total fat in the food is in the form of other fats (e.g. mono unsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fat) These fats (generally found in plant foods such as seeds/grains, nuts, vegetables and fruit) are a better choice as they do not cause cholesterol levels to rise and so may protect against heart disease.

Fibre

This term covers all the indigestible fibre and gums in food. Foods high in fibre take longer to digest and may help keep you fuller for longer. They also contribute to gut health by making food waste move through the gut and prevent constipation. From December 2014 the label will not include fibre.

Protein

Is needed for cell repair and growth. In the UK the majority of us eat sufficient protein. Any extra protein we eat is used as energy for the body.

Energy	kJ/kcal
Fat of which saturates	g
Carbohydrate of which sugars	g
Fibre	g
Protein	g
Sodium	g

The label will give the nutritional information for 100g of product. This makes it possible to make comparisons between foods. In addition the nutritional information can provide information per portion of food to help you know just how much you are eating in a single portion.

From December 2014 the order of nutrients on the label will change.

Carbohydrates

Includes both complex carbohydrates found in starchy foods (bread, potatoes, etc) and simple carbohydrates e.g. sugars. Half of our energy should come from foods that contain complex carbohydrates such as bread, potatoes, pasta and rice.

Sugars

To help us recognise when a food contains sugars rather than starch the extra category of sugars is often included on the label. This term covers all types of sugars including added sugar (sucrose/table sugar) and sugars that are a natural part of a food e.g. lactose (milk sugar) and fructose (fruit sugar) Having just one description for sugars can be confusing. Natural sugars in milk (lactose) and in fruit (fructose) contain as much energy as other sugars but do not cause dental disease. We need to reduce the amount of added sugar in food. This is because sugars that are added to foods only provide energy and no other nutrients helpful to our health. Added sugars also cause dental disease. Some foods may also be labelled 'contains natural sugars' to show that some of the sugar content is from natural forms.

Sodium

Salt is also called 'sodium chloride', as it is made up from two naturally occurring parts – sodium and chlorine. Salt is found naturally in many foods like meat and vegetables but is also added to foods to improve taste and shelf life. In fact we can get all the salt our bodies need from natural sources and we don't need to add it to our food. It is the sodium part of salt that is a concern to health, and this is why current food labels list the sodium content of food. A food manufacturer may also list this as salt to help you to understand how much salt you are eating.

Convert Sodium to Salt - multiply by 2.5

For example: to find out how much salt is in a food containing 0.8g sodium:

0.8g sodium x 2.5 = 2g Salt

Adults should eat no more than 6g salt/day (children only 2-5g depending on their age).

From December 2014 all food labels will list salt – not sodium, making it easier for you to see how much salt you are eating.