

Be a label reader

Find out more about what you are eating by learning to read the information on food products.

Step 1: Read the Nutrition Information Panel

Sometimes it is not clear from the ingredient list whether a product is suitable to eat or not. It is often helpful to read the nutrition information panel. General guidelines for making healthy choices have been suggested below. Some foods may not fit these guidelines but still may be healthy choices.

Serve sizes differ between products, so compare foods by looking at the per 100g column.

Serving size:

Beware, the manufacturer's serve size may not be the serve size you are eating. Always look at the 'per 100g' column to compare products.

To work out how many **exchanges/ serves** there are in the food, divide the total carbohydrate per serve by 15*

*15g of carbohydrate = 1 exchange/serve.

WEET-BIX		
Servings per package	33	
Serving size	30g (2 biscuits)	
	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	492kj	1490kj
Protein	4.1	12.4g
Fat		
- Total	0.5g	1.4g
- Saturated	0.1g	0.3g
Carbohydrate		
- Total	22.1g	67g
- Sugar	1.1g	3.3g
Fibre	3.6g	11.0g
Sodium	96mg	290mg
INGREDIENTS: Whole grain wheat (97%), raw sugar, salt, barley malt extract, minerals (zinc gluconate, iron), Vitamins (niacin, thiamine, riboflavin, folate).		

FAT	
Total	Aim for < 10g/100g*. For milk and yoghurt aim for <2g/100g.
Saturated	Aim for as low as possible
Trans	Aim for < 1g/100g for margarine
<i>*Oils and margarines are high in fat. Choose poly and monounsaturated varieties and use sparingly.</i>	
CARBOHYDRATE	
Sugars	Avoid foods with added sugars
DIETARY FIBRE	
Excellent	5g/100g
Good	3g/100g
SALT (Sodium)	
Excellent	120mg/100g
Good	400mg/100g
<i>Look for 'no added salt' or 'salt reduced'</i>	

To work out the number of exchanges per serve, round off using the following:

5 - 10g	=	½ exchange
11 - 19g	=	1 exchange
20 - 25g	=	1½ exchanges
26 - 34g	=	2 exchanges

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Step 2: Read the ingredients list

Ingredients are listed in order of quantity from the most to the least. Look for fat, sugar and salt. If these are listed well down the ingredient list, the product will probably be suitable.

Example 1

Rye Bread

Ingredients: unbleached flour, rye flour, rye meal, baker's yeast, gluten, salt, vinegar, vegetable oil, soy flour, semolina, roasted barley malt, oat bran, cultured whey, dry acid whey, emulsifiers (481, 472(e), 471), sugar, vitamin (thiamine), water added.

Example 2

Chocolate Jaffa Cookies

Ingredients: wheat flour, margarine (contains animal fat), milk solids non-fat, flavours, compound chocolate, sugar.

If fat or sugar is at the top of the list the product may not be a good choice. Refer to the nutrition information panel if you are not sure.

Step 3: Look for Hidden Ingredients

Sometimes ingredients may be listed by a name you are not familiar with. Check the list below.

Fat	Added sugars	Fibre	Salt
Animal fat	Fructose	Wholewheat	Salt
Shortening	Lactose	Wholemeal	Sodium
Beef fat	Honey	Wholegrain	Rock salt
Lard	Sucrose	Bran	Sea salt
Dripping	Sugar, raw sugar	Wheat bran	Onion salt
Cream	Invert sugar	Barley bran	Celery salt
Butter fat	Glucose syrup	Rolled oats	Garlic salt
Tallow	Malt, malt extract	Barley	Booster
Coconut oil	Dextrose	Oat bran	MSG (Monosodium
Palm oil	Treacle	Wheatmeal	Glutamate, 621)
Vegetable fat	Golden syrup	Rye	Meat / vegetable extract
Chocolate	Molasses	Buckwheat	Stock cubes
Monoglycerides	Maple syrup	Hi-maize starch	Sodium bicarbonate
Milk solids	Brown sugar	Resistant starch	Baking powder
Hydrogenated oils	Corn syrup	BARLEYmax	Sodium metabisulphite
Margarine	Concentrated fruit juice		
Chocolate or carob coating			
Seeds, nuts & coconut			

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Nutritional claims – what do they really mean?

Many claims are made on food labels. Make sure you know which are suitable for you.

Health claim	Suitable?	Comment	Example
97% fat free	Low fat choice, but need to check carbohydrate, salt & fibre	Contains 3gms fat per 100g	97% fat free mayonnaise 97% fat free muesli bars
25% reduced fat	Misleading	25% less fat than the regular product – could still be high fat	Reduced fat cheese
Low fat	Low fat choice, but need to check other nutrients e.g. total carbohydrate	Low in fat compared to regular product	Low fat milk
'Cholesterol Free' or 'Low Cholesterol'	Misleading	Cholesterol is only found in animal products – the product may still be high in plant fats and kilojoules	Any vegetable oil or margarine – e.g. olive oil, Flora
Mono or poly unsaturated	Check label for total fat. Product can still be high in fat	Preferred to saturated fat – check the total fat content	Mono or poly unsaturated oil or margarine
'Toasted' or 'Baked'	Misleading	Usually cooked with fat – check the fat content	Toasted muesli
Lite or light	Misleading	May refer to taste, texture or colour – check the label	Light olive oil
	Check the label. Good for fat and protein based foods.	The product meets standards for saturated fat, trans fat and salt. Total carbohydrate and GI may be high. Check the panel.	Various margarines or oils, meats, frozen, tinned foods
Reduced fat	Misleading	May still be high fat even if fat content is reduced.	Reduced fat biscuits, cheeses
No added sugar	Check the label	No added sucrose, but may still be high in total carbohydrate.	Confectionary
Carbohydrate modified	Misleading	Use alternatives to sweeten which may still contain kilojoules and can affect BGL's, often high in fat	Imported "Diabetic" chocolate, some sugar free lollies
'No Added Salt' or 'Salt Reduced'	Check the label	This can mean no salt added or the salt content is reduced compared to the original product	Some canned foods
Natural or health food	Misleading	Oil, fat, cream and sugar are all natural – read the label carefully!	Nut bars
Low joule or diet	Good choice	Low in kilojoules & often sweetened with artificial sweeteners	Diet soft drink, diet cordial, diet jam
	Good choice for carbohydrate foods	An approved GI testing facility has tested the food for its glycaemic index. The food has a low GI. The actual GI value and its meaning will appear near the symbol or nutrition panel.	Breads, breakfast cereals, grains, pasta, starchy vegetables (potato), fruit, sweeteners, milk and yoghurts

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Food Labelling Laws

Nutrition Information Panel

Under current laws, nearly all manufactured foods must carry a nutrition information panel. The information must be presented in a standard format that shows the amount per serve and per 100g (or 100ml if liquid) of the food.

Foods that do not require a nutrition information panel include fresh fruit and vegetables, foods not sold in a package, foods contained within very small packages, single ingredient foods (e.g. tea and coffee) and food made and packaged from the premises from which it is sold (e.g. take-away foods).

Percentage of key ingredients

The percentage of key ingredients in a product is shown on the label – e.g. the percentage of strawberries in strawberry jam.

Saturated fat content

The saturated fat content of the food is displayed on the nutrition panel. Eating foods high in saturated fat can increase the risk of developing heart disease.

Trans fats

Under current laws, manufacturers are not required to display the trans fatty acid content on a label unless a claim is made about cholesterol and fats. Most foods sold in Australia are not high in trans fat, with the exception of some fast-foods. Eating foods high in trans fats can increase the risk of developing heart disease.

Declaration of presence of allergens

Foods, food ingredients or components of an ingredient that can cause severe adverse reactions in some individuals – such as peanuts and other nuts, seafood, fish, milk, gluten, eggs and soybeans – must be declared on the label, however small the amount.

Date marking

Foods that must be eaten before a certain time for safety reasons are date marked with a 'use by' date. These foods should not be sold or eaten after this date – e.g. milk. Most other foods are marked with a 'best before' date. It may still be safe to eat these foods after the 'best before' date but they may have lost some quality. Foods that have a 'best before' date can continue to be sold after the date provided the food is fit for human consumption.



For more information:

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