

# A Guide to Food Labelling

**The diet for people with diabetes is not a special diet – it should be a healthy diet for all your family and friends to enjoy. This leaflet aims to help you understand food labels to easily choose healthy foods for the whole family.**

Understanding nutritional labels can help you make healthy food choices. Look at the food first: there are no foods you must not eat. Instead aim to eat more fruit and vegetables and fewer foods that are high in fat, salt and/or sugar. Diabetic or low-carbohydrate foods are not recommended and offer no benefit to people with diabetes.



## Nutritional information

Nutritional information is normally shown on the back or side of packaged foods. This usually includes information on energy (calories), protein, carbohydrate and fat. It may also provide additional information on saturated fat, sugars, sodium, salt and fibre. All nutrition information is provided per 100g or 100ml, and sometimes per portion/serving of the food. Information using portion/serving values are only helpful if that is the amount you eat.

Typical nutritional label on the side of packaging.

| Nutritional Information: | Amount per 100g | Amount per serving (200g) |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Energy                   | 212 kj/50kcal   | 424 kj/100kcal            |
| Protein                  | 1.9g            | 3.8g                      |
| Carbohydrate             | 10.1g           | 20.2g                     |
| (of which sugars)        | (1.7g)          | (3.4g)                    |
| (of which starch)        | (8.4g)          | (16.8g)                   |
| Fat                      | 0.2g            | 0.4g                      |
| (of which saturates)     | (trace)         | (trace)                   |
| Fibre                    | 0.6g            | 1.2g                      |
| Salt (sodium)            | 1g (0.4g)       | 2g (0.8g)                 |

- Energy is normally measured in calories (kcal), or kilojoules (kj).
- Protein describes the total amount of protein in grams.
- Carbohydrate describes the total amount of sugar and starch in a food in grams.
  - The figure given for sugars includes both sugars found naturally in food, and sugars added to food.
  - Added sugars include sugar, sucrose, glucose, high fructose syrup, invert syrup, maltose and honey.
  - 5g of sugar is approximately the same as a teaspoon of sugar.
- Fat is the total amount of fat including polyunsaturated, monounsaturated and saturated.
- Fibre includes both insoluble and soluble fibre. Aim to have more high-fibre foods (6g or more/100g food), for example wholegrain breads and cereals, fruit, vegetables and pulses.
- Salt or sodium is described in grams – 1g of sodium is roughly the same as 2.5g of salt.

Discuss these points with your dietitian to get the right balance for your child.

## Front of pack labelling

Front of pack labels hold 2 types of information – Reference Intakes (RI) and the Red, Amber, Green (traffic lights) system to help us all make healthy choices.

### Reference Intake (RI)

RI values aim to help us make sense of the nutritional information on food labels. They provide guidelines, **not targets**, for the amount of key nutrients and energy in a healthy adult's diet. People's nutrient requirements vary according to age, gender and activity – children's needs are different from adults.

RIs are not always useful when reading labels for children – look at the value, not the percentage of each nutrient.

Each grilled burger (94g) contains

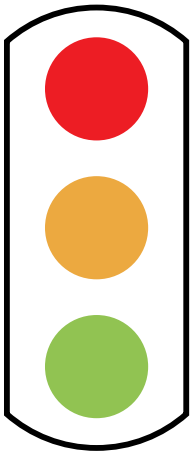
|                              |            |                   |                |              |
|------------------------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Energy<br>924 kJ<br>220 kcal | Fat<br>13g | Saturates<br>5.9g | Sugars<br>0.8g | Salt<br>0.7g |
| 11%                          | 19%        | 30%               | <1%            | 12%          |

of an adult's reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: energy 966kj/230kcal

### Red, Amber, Green (Traffic Lights)

Some labels use the 'traffic lights' system to guide you on healthy choices. Red, amber and green colours are used to show if foods have high, medium or low levels of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. These often show the amount of these nutrients that are present in manufacturers' suggested portion/serving size.



**Red = High**

The food will be high in something you are trying to eat less of, but will be fine to have occasionally.

**Amber = Medium**

The food will have medium amounts of a nutrient, so will be fine to have sometimes.

**Green = Low**

The food will be low for that nutrient. The more green lights you have, the healthier the choice.

Many foods will have a mixture of colours on them. When choosing between similar products, go for more greens and ambers, and fewer reds. This will help you to make the healthiest choice. Looking at the labels below, the Tuna and Cucumber sandwich is the healthier choice as it has more green and fewer red labels.

**Sausage, Bacon and Egg Sandwich**

|                    |              |                   |                |              |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Energy<br>693 kcal | Fat<br>28.3g | Saturates<br>6.8g | Sugars<br>6.8g | Salt<br>3.3g |
| 35%                | 40%          | 34%               | 8%             | 55%          |

of an adult's reference intake

**Tuna and Cucumber Sandwich**

|                    |            |                   |                |              |
|--------------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Energy<br>386 kcal | Fat<br>13g | Saturates<br>5.9g | Sugars<br>0.8g | Salt<br>0.7g |
| 19%                | 21%        | 7%                | 4%             | 1.5%         |

of an adult's reference intake

**Remember that the portion size on the pack may be different from the size that you eat or drink.**

**How can I tell the quantity of each ingredient in a product?**

All packaged foods carry an ingredients list. This will give you an idea of how much of each ingredient there is in the product. The ingredients are listed in descending order of weight, so the ingredient with the largest quantity is always first on the list.

The ingredients list from canned spaghetti is shown below:

**Ingredients** – Spaghetti (Water, Durum Wheat Semolina, Wheat Flour), Tomatoes, Sugar, Glucose - Fructose Syrup, Modified Cornflour, Salt, Citric Acid, Herb Extract, Garlic Salt, Spice Extract

This ingredients list tells you that the main ingredients are spaghetti and tomatoes. However, it still contains sugar as it is the third item on the list. Reading the nutritional information will provide further information about how much sugar is in this product.

# What do health claims mean?

Health claims on labels can have different meanings on different products. The list below provides tips to help.

## Total fat

- High – more than 17.5g of fat per 100g or 8.75g per 100ml.
- Low-fat – 3g of fat or less per 100g or 1.5g of fat or less per 100ml of the product.
- Reduced-fat – the food must contain 30% less fat than a similar standard product: it does not mean the product is 'low in fat'. The food may still contain a lot of fat and as many calories as the standard product.
- 'Less than 5% fat' or '95% fat free' indicates that the product contains less than 5g of fat per 100g or 100ml. However, this could still mean that a serving has a lot of fat, for example a 400g ready meal with 'less than 5% fat' could contain 20g fat.
- Some products state the percentage less fat than the standard product, for example 20% less fat than a comparable product. This does not necessarily mean the product is low in fat.
- Saturated Fat
  - High – more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g or 2.5g per 100ml
  - Low – 1.5g of saturated fat or less per 100g or 0.75g of saturated fat per 100ml

## Sugars

- High
  - More than 22.5g of total sugars per 100g or 11.25g per 100ml.
  - More than 27g per serving of food or 13.5g per serving of fluid.
- Low-sugar – 5g or less of total sugars per 100g, or 2.5g of sugar per 100ml.
- No-added-sugar – no sugars from any source have been added to the product. It may still contain a lot of natural sugar, for example fruit sugar (fructose) in fruit juice, milk sugar (lactose) in milk, yoghurt, and should say 'Contains naturally occurring sugars'.
- Reduced-sugar – must contain 30% less sugar than the regular product. This does **not** mean the product is low in sugar.

## Salt

- High – more than 1.5g of salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium).
- Low – 0.3g of salt or less per 100g (or 0.1g sodium).

Guidance salt values are for adults. Guideline values for children are less than adults. Your dietitian will provide more appropriate guidance for your child.

**Remember to look at food and drink labels to make sensible choices and get the balance right.**

*Supporting patient care nationwide*

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