

Fact Sheet

Central Adelaide Local Health Network
Diabetes Education Service

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

The nutrition information panel can help you decide if a product is a healthy option.

General guidelines have been suggested below. Some foods may not fit these guidelines but still may be healthy choices.

The serve sizes will differ between products, so the best way to compare foods is by looking at the per 100g column.

Serving size: The manufacturer's serve size may not be the serve size you are eating. Always look at the 'per 100g' column to compare products.
For fibre look at the per serve column.

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 or 1 serve

DIETARY FIBRE	
Excellent	3g or more per serve

Nutrition Information

WEET-BIX		
Servings per package: 30		
Serving size: 30g (2 biscuits)		
	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	447kJ	1490kJ
Protein	3.7g	12.4g
Fat		
- Total	0.4g	1.3g
- Saturated	0.1g	0.3g
- Trans	0g	0g
Carbohydrate		
- Total	20.1g	67g
- Sugar	1.0g	3.3g
Fibre	3.3g	11.0g
Sodium	81mg	270mg

INGREDIENTS: Whole grain wheat (97%), raw sugar, salt, barley malt extract, mineral (iron), Vitamins (niacin, thiamine, riboflavin, folate).

FAT	
Total	Aim for <10g/100g*. For milk and yoghurt aim for <2g/100g
Saturated	Aim for less than 3g or as low as possible
Trans	Aim for < 1g/100g for margarine

**Oils and margarines are high in fat. Choose poly and monounsaturated varieties and use sparingly.*

CARBOHYDRATE	
Sugars	Limit foods high in added sugar Eg soft drinks, fruit juice drinks, lollies, chocolate, sweet biscuits

SALT (Sodium)	
Excellent	120mg/100g
Good	400mg/100g

Look for 'no added salt' or 'salt reduced'

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

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. Refer to the nutrition information panel if you are unsure if the product is 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.

Step 3: Look for Hidden Ingredients

Sometimes ingredients may be listed by a name you are not familiar with.

Check the list below.

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

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 3g of fat per 100g or less for foods, or 1.5g of fat per 100ml for drinks.	97% fat free mayonnaise 97% fat free muesli bars
Low fat	Low fat choice, but need to check other nutrients e.g. total carbohydrate, sugars	Contains 3g of fat per 100g or less for foods, or 1.5g of fat per 100ml for drinks.	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	These fats are healthy for your heart – 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	At least 25% less fat than the regular product – could still be high in fat.	Reduced fat biscuits, cheeses
No added sugar	Check the label	The food contains no added sugars, but may still be high in natural sugars and total carbohydrate.	Confectionary
Reduced salt	Check the label	At least 25% less than the regular product – could still be high in salt.	Some canned foods
No added salt	Check the label	No salt has been added to this 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

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).

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.

Percentage % daily intake

Some manufacturers may choose to include information about the contribution of a serving of their product to your total daily nutrient intake (eg: 1 slice provides 12% of your daily fibre needs). This is known as ‘% daily intake’. Use this as a guide only as your daily intake may be higher or lower depending on your energy needs.

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. 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.

Acknowledgements: CALHN, NALHN, SALHN Dietitians.

The information contained within the publication does not constitute medical advice, and is for general information only.

Readers should always seek independent, professional advice where appropriate.

For more information

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