

Reading Food Labels

Reading labels can help you make healthy food choices for the children in your centre. Look for the nutrition information panel and the ingredient list to help you decide whether a product is suitable



NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL e.g. strawberry yoghurt

	Per serve (Serve size = 200g)	Per 100g
Energy	912 kJ 218 kCal	456 kJ 109 kCal
Protein	10.4 g	5.2 g
Total Fat	1.8 g	0.9 g
- Saturated Fat	1.2 g	0.6 g
Carbohydrate		
- Total	24.8	12.4
- Sugars	24.8	12.4
Sodium	170mg	85mg
Calcium	326 mg	163 mg

Ingredients:

Concentrated skim milk, milk, skim milk, sugar, strawberries (9%) gelatine, thickener (1442)

Step 1. The Ingredients List

Ingredients are listed in order of quantity from the most to the least, excluding water.

Look for foods with sources of fat, sugar, and salt. If these are listed well down on the ingredient list, the product will be more suitable. See the list below for foods containing these nutrients, sometimes known as '*Hidden Ingredients*'

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

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Step 2 The Nutrition Information Panel

The Nutrition Information Panel on food labels gives you important information about the energy (kilojoules), fat, salt and fibre content of foods. This allows you to compare different foods & make healthier choices.

When comparing foods use the **per 100ml** or **per 100g** column to make sure you are comparing the same quantity of different foods.

Serve size

This usually indicates a 'standard' serve for an adult and may be more than a child serve.

Fat

Products with **20g fat per 100g** or less, are generally acceptable.

Look for the lowest fat content, especially SATURATED FATS, which should be less than **5g per 100g**.

For drinks, look for less than **10g fat per 100ml**, and less than **2.5g of saturated fat per 100ml**.

For dairy products, make sure you choose products with appropriate fat levels for the age of the children:

- Use full cream milk, cheese and yoghurt for children under 2
- Reduced fat and low fat milks (1.0-2.5% fat) are suitable for 2-5 year olds
- Skim milk (less than 0.5% fat) should not be used for birth to five year olds

Margarines and oils have a high fat content. Choose poly and mono-unsaturated varieties. Be aware that TRANS FATS are similar to saturated fats which increase bad cholesterol levels in blood (a key indicator for heart disease). In addition, trans fats may also decrease good cholesterol in blood.

Sugar

Try to choose products with less than **15g per 100g** of sugar. If a product has fruit in it then up to **25g per 100g** is suitable.

For drinks, look for less than **7.5g per 100ml** of sugar.

Salt (listed as sodium on labels)


Babies and young children need products low in sodium, as their kidney are too immature to deal with large amounts. Products with less than **120mg sodium per 100g** are an excellent choice. Products with **600 mg sodium per 100g** are a good choice. Look for products labelled *reduced salt* or *no added salt*.

Fibre

Look for the highest fibre content.

A high fibre product has **3g per serve** or **5g per 100g**


What to Aim For ?



- Total fat**
 - less than 20g per 100g
- Saturated fat**
 - less than 5g per 100g
- Sugars**
 - less than 15g per 100g
 - up to 25g per 100g for foods containing fruit
- Sodium**
 - less than 600mg per 100g
- Fibre**
 - more than 5g per 100g

Nutritional claims – what do they really mean?

Nutritional claims generally refer to the phrases present on food packaging which aim to entice a consumer to purchase the product. These words can create the image of a healthy product but it is difficult to know their accuracy. Below is a list of the most common ones.

CLAIM	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	COMMENTS
Lite or Light	May be used to describe the taste or texture, such as 'Light' olive oil, but generally refers to reduced fat products. E.g. 'Light' margarine.	May be misleading - check what it refers to
Low fat or Fat free	The product is meets the criteria to be classed as low fat or fat free	Low in fat but can be misleading e.g. sugar content can still be high
Fat Reduced	Food contains at least 25% less fat than the regular product. Need to check food label for fat content per 100g. These foods may still be high in fat e.g. reduced fat cheese	Check the nutritional panel for fat content. 10g/100g or less is best (<2g/100g for dairy except for under 2yrs)
Low Cholesterol, or cholesterol free	Cholesterol is a fat found only in animal foods, so a product may be low in cholesterol, but may be high in total fat and therefore high in energy (kilojoules).	Misleading
Polyunsaturated or Poly Monounsaturated or Mono	Refers to the type of fat used in the product. Often these are desirable food choices, but use in small amounts.	Worth considering
Low Joule	Tends to indicate a product is lower in sugar or fat. Often artificially sweetened.	Artificially sweetened products are not recommended for young children.
No added sugar	Means no added sugar (sucrose), but the product may contain natural sugars.	Check the overall sugar content (may still be high)
Carbohydrate Modified	Usually means an alternative to sugar such as sorbitol or mannitol is used. These may contain the same energy as sugar, so are best avoided.	Usually not appropriate
No Added Salt	Means that extra salt is not added to the product, however the product may still contain a high level of its own natural salts.	Worth considering – check overall salt content
Salt Reduced	Foods contain no more that 75% salt of the equivalent products, thus may still be fairly high in salts.	Misleading – check overall salt content
Low Salt	Foods contain no more that 50% salt content of the equivalent products.	Worth Considering
High Fibre	Means this is a good source of dietary fibre	Worth Considering
Heart Foundation 'Pick the Tick' 	Foods with the <i>Tick</i> of approval are healthier choices among foods of their type. <i>Tick</i> foods are lower in fat, saturated fat and sodium (salt). Many are also higher in fibre and calcium, and have less added sugar. However foods without the Tick may still be healthy choices so check the label.	Worth Considering

Nutritional claims on food labels are covered by the Food Standards Code. For further information its regulation see Food Standards Australia & New Zealand (FSANZ) website www.foodstandards.gov.au.

Food Labelling Laws

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.

Nutrition Panel

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

Foods that do not require to bear a nutritional panel include fresh fruit and vegetables, foods not sold in a package, foods contained within very small packages, single ingredient foods – eg tea and coffee – and food made and packaged from the premises from which it is sold.

Percentage of Key Ingredients

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

Saturated Fat Content

The saturated fat content of the food is displayed on the nutrition panel. Previously manufacturers were only required to display the **total** fat content on the packet, not the saturated fat content.

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 it.

Date Marking

Foods that must be eaten before a certain time for safety reasons are date marked with a 'use by' date and these foods should not be sold or eaten after this date – eg infant formula. 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.



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