

At a glance: making sense of food and drink labelling



Food labels include nutrition information that can help us make healthier food and drink choices. By eating well and being a healthy weight, we can reduce our risk of cancer and other diseases like heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

Types of nutrition information on packaging:

- ◆ Nutrition tables – found on most pre-packed foods and drinks, usually printed on the back
- ◆ Front-of-pack labels – simplified nutrition information (such as traffic light colour-coded labels) found on the front of some pre-packed foods and drinks
- ◆ Ingredients – listed in order of amount (by weight), from highest to lowest

How to use front-of-pack labels

Looking at front-of-pack labels is the easiest way to see whether a food is a healthy choice. You can use them to compare products. They also show if it's okay to eat a food often (or in large amounts), or if it should be an occasional treat (or eaten in small amounts).

Not all foods and drinks have a front-of-pack label

Front-of-pack labels are voluntary, but the Government is encouraging manufacturers and retailers to use one consistent design as widely as possible. See the example below.

What's a 'serving'?

Food manufacturers decide what is an acceptable 'serving' or portion size.

It's important to check the portion size – even similar types of food might use different sized portions. This example provides the nutrition information for a 30g serving of breakfast cereal, even though many of us would eat more than this.

Nutrients – fat, saturates, sugars and salt

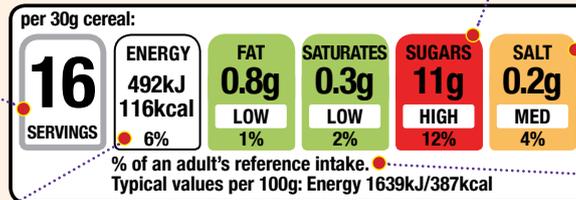
Labels show the amount of each nutrient in a portion, in grams. The amounts will also be colour-coded so you can easily see if that amount is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green).

Which colour?

The colour is decided by the amount of each nutrient there is in 100g. In this example, salt is in the amber (medium) category. See the back of the removable card to find out how the categories are decided.

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Front-of-pack nutrition label (example)



Always remember to check the serving size these values are for. They may not be for the amount you usually eat or drink.

Reference Intake

These percentages show how much a portion provides of the 'reference intake' – the daily maximum amount of each nutrient for an average adult. Exactly how much you need depends on your size and lifestyle, and remember these amounts are an upper limit for most people, not a target to aim for.

Energy

Energy is measured in kilojoules (kJ) and kilocalories (kcal – often called calories). Labels show the amount in 100g (100ml for drinks), the amount in a portion, or both. Remember to check which you are looking at so you don't under or overestimate the calories you'll actually be eating or drinking. An average woman needs about 2,000 calories a day and an average man needs about 2,500 calories. Children and older adults tend to need less, whereas teenagers and very active people may need more.

Does red mean stop?

The more reds on a front-of-pack label, the less healthy the food is likely to be. Most foods with more than one or two reds should only be eaten occasionally. There are some exceptions that you can include in a healthy balanced diet. For example, cheeses are a good source of calcium and protein, and nuts contain healthy fats, vitamins and minerals. So you don't need to cut out these foods altogether, just try to eat them less frequently or only in small amounts.

If a food has all or mostly greens, it's likely to be a healthier choice and you can eat it often or in larger amounts. Amber means a food is neither high nor low in a nutrient, so you can eat foods with all or mostly ambers quite often.

'Use by' vs 'best before'

Use by dates are included on foods and drinks that go off quickly, such as fresh milk and meat. Beyond the printed use by date they are no longer considered safe to eat.

Best before dates mean that after the printed date, the food or drink might not taste as it is supposed to, or its texture might have changed, but it is probably still safe to eat.

What does 'no added sugar' mean?

'No added sugar' means exactly that – that manufacturers haven't added any sugar to the food or drink. But this doesn't necessarily mean it doesn't contain any sugar. For example, fruit contains natural sugars, meaning that dried fruits and fruit juices may have amber or even red labels for sugar.

You can check if sugar has been added by reading the ingredients list – as well as 'sugar', look out for words ending in '-ose' as these can be other words for sugar. For example, sucrose, glucose and fructose. Ingredients are listed in weight order, so if any of these appear near the top of the list, the product is likely to be very sugary.

Remember, both added and naturally-occurring sugars are calorific and can damage your teeth so you should try to limit how much you have.

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Colour-coding explained: for food

Cut out both tables separately and stick together, back-to-back, to create a handy reference card you can keep in your wallet.



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Front-of-pack nutrition label (example)

per 30g cereal:

16 SERVINGS	ENERGY 460kJ 110kcal 6%	FAT 0.7g LOW 2%	SATURATES 0.1g LOW 1%	SUGARS 5.1g HIGH 6%	SALT 0.2g MED 4%
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% of an adult's reference intake.
Typical values per 100g: Energy 1530kJ/360kcal

Always remember to check the serving size these values are for. They may not be for the amount you usually eat.



Food labelling: colour-coding explained

Amount of each nutrient in 100g of food

	High	Medium	Low
(TOTAL) SUGARS	over 22.5g (over 27g/portion*)	over 5g to 22.5g	5g and below
FAT	over 17.5g (over 21g/portion*)	over 3g to 17.5g	3g and below
SATURATES	over 5g (over 6g/portion*)	over 1.5g to 5g	1.5g and below
SALT	over 1.5g (over 1.8g/portion*)	over 0.3g to 1.5g	0.3g and below

* Used when suggested portion size is greater than 100g

Please note: this card contains more in-depth information compared to the printed version of this leaflet.

Colour-coding explained: for drinks

Cut out both tables separately and stick together, back-to-back, to create a handy reference card you can keep in your wallet.



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Front-of-pack nutrition label (example)

per 250ml serving:					
2 SERVINGS	ENERGY 450kJ 105kcal 5%	FAT 0.0g LOW 0%	SATURATES 0.0g LOW 0%	SUGARS 26.5g HIGH 29%	SALT 0.0g LOW 0%
% of an adult's reference intake. Typical values per 100ml: Energy 180kJ/42kcal					

Always remember to check the serving size these values are for. They may not be for the amount you usually drink.



Food labelling: colour-coding explained

Amount of each nutrient in 100g of food

	High	Medium	Low
(TOTAL) SUGARS	over 11.25g (over 13.5g/portion*)	over 2.5g to 11.25g	2.5g and below
FAT	over 8.75g (over 10.5g/portion*)	over 1.5g to 8.75g	1.5g and below
SATURATES	over 2.5g (over 3g/portion*)	over 0.75g to 2.5g	0.75g and below
SALT	over 0.75g (over 0.9g/portion*)	over 0.3g to 0.75g	0.3g and below

* Used when suggested portion size is greater than 150ml

Please note: this card is not currently included in the printed version of this leaflet.