

# Reading Food Labels

Food labels can tell you a lot about the foods you eat.

## **A label must have**

### **1. Name or description of the food**

### **2. Ingredient list**

The ingredients are listed in order of greatest to least quantity. If an ingredient list has fat, sugar or salt at or near the top of the list it is likely to contain a large quantity of that ingredient.

Fat, sugar and salt are often called by other names. Look out for these:

Sugar = raw sugar, sucrose, fructose, maltose, dextrose, lactose, golden syrup, corn syrup, treacle, honey, malt, malt extract, molasses, palm sugar.

Fat = triglycerides, animal oil, animal fat, vegetable oil, vegetable fat, shortening, milk solids, copha, tallow, lard, palm oil, coconut cream, dripping, butter, margarine.

Salt = rock salt, vegetable salt, baking soda, baking powder, sodium, sodium bicarbonate, monosodium glutamate.

Below is the ingredient list for Mrs MacGregor's Oat Cakes

Ingredients: Wholemeal flour, butter, rolled oats, golden syrup, raw sugar, baking soda, lecithin, salt

This product would be reasonably high in fat because butter is the second ingredient listed.

Colourings, flavourings and other such additives must have a number to indicate what it is. There are books and code-breakers that give you more information on these additives. Monosodium glutamate for example is listed using the number 621. If a person is sensitive to MSG (monosodium glutamate) s/he should avoid all foods with the number 621 included in the ingredient list.

### **3. Nutrition Information Panel (NIP)**

The panel must contain information on

- Energy (in kilojoules)
- Protein
- Total Fat
- Saturated fat
- Carbohydrates
- Sugars
- Sodium

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This information is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or individual consultation with a Registered Dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.

Code: NUT0077

Date: October 2005, authorised by the Nutrition and Physical Activity Team, Community and Public Health

**Canterbury**

District Health Board

Te Pori i aua o Waitaha

The information looks like this

## Mrs MacGregor's Oat Cakes

NUTRITION INFORMATION (Average)		
Serving size: 50g (1 biscuit)		
Servings per package: 6		
	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy (kj)	475	950
Protein (g)	3.6	6.2
Fat, Total (g)	4.2	8.4
- Saturated (g)	1.8	3.6
Carbohydrate, Total (g)	25	48
- Sugars	11	22
Sodium (mg)	84	168

If a manufacture makes a claim like, “a good source of iron”, then that nutrient, iron, has to be shown on the NIP.

When comparing products use the 100g column. Choose a product that is lower in total fat and saturated fat.

Use the NIP to compare the fibre content of bread and cereals, and salt (sodium) content of processed foods. People with diabetes can also refer to the sugar column.

4. The percentage of key ingredients in a product must be shown. Key ingredients are not necessarily those that are there in the most quantity, but those that give the product its definition and character. Beef pies for example, must state the percentage of beef in them.

5. Foods that may cause allergies such as peanuts, nuts, sesame seeds, soybeans, added sulphites, fish, seafood, wheat, milk, eggs and certain bee products must be declared on the label. This makes it easier for people with allergies to select safe food.

6. Foods that contain certain substances that may carry health risks **associated with them** must be labelled. These include unpasteurised milk, unpasteurised egg, quinine, caffeine, aspartame, guarana, phytosterol esters, sugar alcohols, bee pollen and propolis.

7. **Name and New Zealand or Australian street address of the manufacturer or importer**, as well as a lot and batch number (for recall purposes).

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**8. A “best before” or “use by” date.** Foods cannot be sold beyond their “Use By” date. Foods can be sold beyond their “Best Before” date provided it is still fit for consumption.

## **9. Storage requirements**

### **10. Nutrient Claims**

Manufacturers emphasise the nutritional benefits of a product eg “low fat”, “no added sugar”, by using nutrient claims. Nutrient content claims are not mandatory. Policy is still being decided on the use of these claims.

**Knowing how to read labels will enable you to make informed food decisions.**

**For more information on reading food labels visit the New Zealand Food Safety Authority – [www.nzfsa.govt.nz](http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz)**

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