

## SIMPLE GUIDE TO READING FOOD LABELS

Nutrition labels can help you choose between products and keep a check on the amount of foods you're eating that are high in fat, salt and added sugars.

### Nutrition labels on packaging

For example, here is the back of pack nutrition label on a loaf of white bread.

#### Nutrition

Typical values	100g contains	Each slice (typically 44g) contains	% RI*	RI* for an average adult
Energy	985kJ 235kcal	435kJ 105kcal	5%	8400kJ 2000kcal
Fat	1.5g	0.7g	1%	70g
of which saturates	0.3g	0.1g	1%	20g
Carbohydrate	45.5g	20.0g		
of which sugars	3.8g	1.7g	2%	90g
Fibre	2.8g	1.2g		
Protein	7.7g	3.4g		
Salt	1.0g	0.4g	7%	6g

This pack contains 16 servings

\*Reference intake of an average adult (8400kJ / 2000kcal)

This type of label includes information on energy (kJ/kcal), protein, carbohydrate and fat. It may also provide additional information on saturated fat, sugars, sodium, salt and fibre. All nutrition information is provided **per 100 grams** and sometimes **per portion** of the food.

#### But how do I know if a food is high in fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt?

There are guidelines to tell you if a food is high in fat, saturated fat, salt or sugar, or not. These are:

##### Total fat

High: more than 17.5g of fat per 100g

Low: 3g of fat or less per 100g

##### Saturated fat

High: more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g

Low: 1.5g of saturated fat or less per 100g

##### Sugars

High: more than 22.5g of total sugars per 100g

Low: 5g of total sugars or less per 100g

## Salt

High: more than 1.5g of salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium)

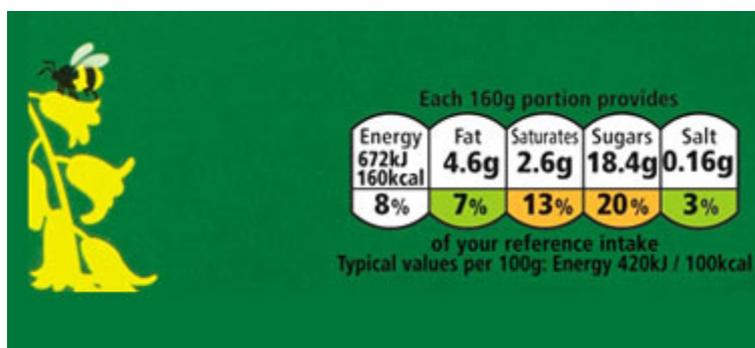
Low: 0.3g of salt or less per 100g (or 0.1g sodium)

For example, if you are trying to cut down on saturated fat, limit your consumption of foods that have more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g.

## Nutrition labels on the front of packaging

Most of the big supermarkets and many food manufacturers also display nutritional information on the front of pre-packed food.

This is very useful when you want to compare different food products at a glance!



Front-of-pack labels, such as the label in the above image, usually give a quick guide to:

- [energy](#)
- fat content
- saturated fat content
- sugar content
- salt content

These labels provide information on the number of grams of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt, and the amount of energy (in kJ and kcal) in a serving or portion of the food. Be aware, that the manufacturer's idea of a portion may be different from yours!

Some front-of-pack nutrition labels also provide information about RI.

## Reference intake (RI)

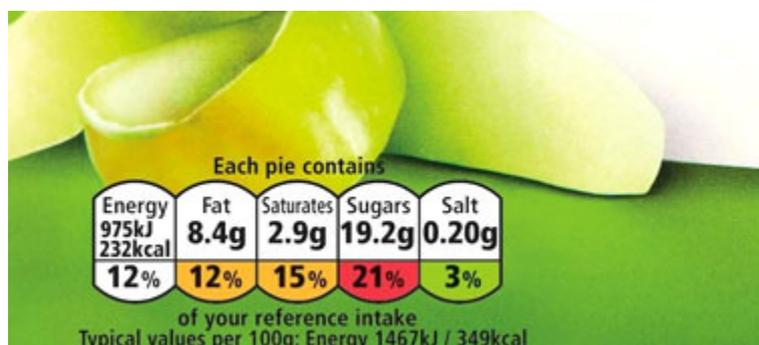
Nutrition labels can also provide information on how a particular food or drink product fits into your daily diet.

Reference intakes are guidelines about the approximate amount of particular nutrients and energy required for a healthy diet.



Because individual requirements for energy and nutrients are different for all people, RIs are not intended as targets. Instead they are intended to *give a useful indication* of how a particular nutrient or amount of energy fits into your daily diet.

Information on the RI and the contribution a nutrient makes towards a RI (expressed as a percentage) can usually be found on the packaging.



For example, the label above shows that each pie will provide you with 19.2 grams of sugars, which represents 21% of your RI for sugars. In other words, this pack contains about a fifth of an adult's RI of sugars.

*(Unless otherwise specified, the percentage RI values are based on an average-sized woman doing an average amount of physical activity. This is for simplicity)*

## Reference intakes for energy, total fat, saturates, sugars and salt

- Energy: 8,400kJ/2,000kcal
- Total fat: 70g
- Saturates: 20g
- Sugars: 90g
- Salt: 6g

## Red, amber and green colour-coding

Some front-of-pack nutrition labels use red, amber and green colour-coding.



Colour-coded nutritional information, as shown in the image above, tells you at a glance if the food has high, medium or low amounts of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt.

- red means high
- amber means medium
- green means low

In short, the more green(s) on the label, the healthier the choice.

If you buy a food that has all or mostly green(s) on the label, you know straight away that it's a healthier choice. Amber means neither high nor low, so you can eat foods with all or mostly amber(s) on the label most of the time. But any red(s) on the label means the food is high in fat, saturated fat, salt or sugars and these are the foods we should cut down on. Try to eat these foods less often and in small amounts.

## Ingredients list

Most pre-packed food products also have a list of ingredients on the packaging or on an attached label. The ingredients list can also help you work out how healthy the product is.

Ingredients are listed in order of weight, so the main ingredients in the packaged food always come first. That means that if the first few ingredients are high-fat ingredients, such as cream, butter or oil, then the food in question is a high-fat food.

## Food shopping tips

You're standing in the supermarket aisle looking at two similar products, trying to decide which to choose. You want to make the healthier choice but you're in a hurry.

If you're buying ready meals, check to see if there's a nutrition label on the front of the pack, and then see how your choices stack up when it comes to the amount of energy, fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt.

If the nutrition labels use colour-coding, you will often find a mixture of red, amber and green. So, when you're choosing between similar products, try to go for more greens and ambers, and fewer reds, if you want to make a healthier choice.

But remember that even healthier ready meals may be higher in fat and energy than the homemade equivalent. If you make the meal yourself, you could save money, too.

Reference: Adapted from NHS UK Livewell information