

Food Labels

What do they mean?

1 Nutrition information panel.

Most packaged foods must have a nutrition information panel. The information must be presented in a standard format which shows the amount per serve and per 100g (or 100ml if liquid) of the food. Examples of a nutrition information panel and the nutrients that have to be listed in the nutrition information have been outlined below.

There are a few exceptions to requiring a nutrition information panel such as:

- very small packages which are about the size of a larger chewing gum packet
- foods with no significant nutritional value (such as a single herb or spice), tea, and coffee
- foods sold unpackaged (unless a nutrition claim is made)
- foods made and packaged at the point of sale, for example bread made in a local bakery.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings per package: 3		
Serving Size: 150g		
	Quantity per Serving	Quantity per 100g
Energy	608kJ	405kJ
Protein	4.2g	2.8g
Fat, total	7.4g	4.9g
– Saturated	4.5g	3.0g
Carbohydrate, total	18.6g	12.4g
– Sugars	18.6g	12.4g
Sodium	90mg	60mg

*Percentage of recommended dietary intake

Ingredients: Whole milk, concentrated skim milk, sugar, banana (8%), strawberry (6%), grape (4%), peach (2%), pineapple (2%), gelatine, culture, thickener (1442).

All quantities above are averages

2 Percentage labelling.

Packaged foods have to carry labels which show the percentage of the key or characterising ingredients or components in the food product. This will enable you to compare similar products. The characterising ingredient for this fruit salad yoghurt is fruit and you can see from the ingredient list that it is banana 8%, strawberry 8%, grape 4%, peach 2%, and pineapple 2%. An example of a percentage of a characterising component would be the amount of cocoa solids in chocolate. Some foods, such as 'white bread' or 'cheese', have no characterising ingredients.

3 Name or description of the food.

Foods must be labelled with an accurate name or description, for example fruit yoghurt must contain fruit. If it were to contain fruit flavouring rather than real fruit, the label would need to say 'fruit flavoured yoghurt'.

4 Food recall information.

Considering the number of foods available, recalls of unsafe or unsuitable foods are uncommon. Food labels must have the name and business address in Australia or New Zealand of the manufacturer or importer, as well as the lot identification of the food (or date coding). This makes food recalls, on the rare occasion that they are necessary, more efficient and effective. In Australia each year there are about 70 food recalls, most of which are precautionary and due to the food manufacturer identifying a problem from their own testing.

Details of Australian recalls are on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website at www.foodstandards.gov.au. New Zealand recalls are on the New Zealand Food Safety Authority website www.nzfsa.govt.nz.

5 Information for allergy sufferers.

Some foods, food ingredients or components of an ingredient can cause severe allergic reactions in some people – this is known as anaphylaxis. Foods such as peanuts, tree nuts (e.g. cashews, almonds, walnuts), shellfish, finned fish, milk, eggs, sesame and soybeans and their products, when present in food, may cause severe allergic reactions and must be declared on the label however small the amount. Gluten is also included in this list but the caution is more for those with Coeliac Disease rather than allergy. Those who are wheat allergic must stay away from all wheat including gluten.

In addition, foods containing sulphite preservatives must be labelled as containing sulphites if they have 10 milligrams per kilogram or more of added sulphites. This is the level that may trigger asthma attacks in some asthmatics.

For more information on food allergies see the Anaphylaxis Australia website www.allergyfacts.org.au or Allergy New Zealand www.allergy.org.nz.

3 Name or description of the food

1 Nutrition information panel

7 Ingredient list

2 Percentage labelling

9 Food additives

12 Country of origin

4 Food recall information

6 Date marking

8 Labels must tell the truth

10 Legibility requirements

5 Information for allergy sufferers

6 Date marking.

Foods with a shelf life of less than two years must have a 'best before' date. It may still be safe to eat those foods after the best before date but they may have lost quality and some nutritional value. Those foods that should not be consumed after a certain date for health and safety reasons must have a 'use by' date. An exception is bread which can be labelled with a 'baked on' or 'baked for' date if its shelf life is less than seven days.

7 Ingredient list.

You will usually find the ingredient list on the back of the product. Ingredients must be listed in descending order (by ingoing weight). This means that when the food was manufactured the first ingredient listed contributed the largest amount and the last ingredient listed contributed the least, compared to the other ingredients. So, if fat, sugar or salt are listed near the start of the list the product contains a greater proportion of these ingredients.

8 Labels must tell the truth.

Suppliers must label food products with accurate weights and measures information. Weights and measures declarations are regulated by Australian State and Territory and New Zealand Government fair trading agencies.

Fair trading laws and food laws in Australia and New Zealand require that labels do not misinform through false, misleading or deceptive representations. For example, a food with a picture of strawberries on the label must contain strawberries.

11 Directions for use and storage

9 Food additives.

Food additives have many different purposes, including making processed food easier to use or ensuring food is preserved safely. They may come from a synthetic or a natural source. For example, emulsifiers prevent salad dressings from separating into layers and preservatives help to keep food safe or fresh longer. All food additives must have a specific use, must have been assessed and approved by FSANZ for safety and must be used in the lowest possible quantity that will achieve their purpose.

Food additives must be identified, usually by a number, and included in the ingredients list. This allows those people that may be sensitive to food additives to avoid them. A thickener has been used in this yoghurt - its additive number is 1442. A full list of numbers and additives can be obtained from the FSANZ website. Some additives are derived from food allergens which must be identified, for example lecithin (soy).

10 Legibility requirements.

Any labelling requirement legally required in the Food Standards Code must be legible, prominent, and distinct from the background and in English. The size of the type in warning statements must be at least 3mm high, except on very small packages

11 Directions for use and storage.

Where specific storage conditions are required in order for a product to keep until its 'best before' or 'use by' date, manufacturers must include this information on the label. For example, 'This yoghurt should be kept refrigerated at or below 4°C'.

12 Country of origin.

Australia and New Zealand have different country of origin labelling requirements. In Australia, packaged, and some unpackaged, foods must state the country where the food was made or produced. This could just be identifying the country where the food was packaged for retail sale and, if any of the ingredients do not originate from that country, a statement that the food is made from imported or local and imported ingredients. Australian legislation also lays down rules about 'Product of Australia', which means it must be made in Australia from Australian ingredients, and 'Made in Australia', which means it is made in Australia with significant imported ingredients.

In New Zealand, country of origin requirements only apply to wines.

For more information

There is more information about food labelling on the FSANZ website www.foodstandards.gov.au or in the book *Choosing the Right Stuff - the official shoppers' guide to food additives and labels, kilojoules and fat content* published by Murdoch Books and available at all good bookshops. For expert nutrition and dietary advice contact your family doctor or an accredited practising dietitian.

You can find a dietitian in a number of ways:

In Australia:

Contact Nutrition Australia at www.nutritionaustralia.org

Visit the 'Find a dietitian section' of the Dietitians Association of Australia's website www.daa.asn.au, check the Yellow Pages or call 1800 812 942 to find an Accredited Practising Dietitian near you.

In New Zealand:

Contact the New Zealand Nutrition Foundation on (09) 489 3417, email nznfn@nutrition.org.nz or website www.foodworks.co.nz/nutritionfoundation

Visit the 'Find a Dietitian' section of the New Zealand Dietetic Association's website at www.dietitians.org.nz or check the Yellow Pages.