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# What's on a label?

Fact sheet

Food labels can be very confusing and tricky to understand. Often we don't have the time to spend trying to work out what they mean and how to use them. Knowing what nutrition information to look for can help you make the best choice for your health and avoid unnecessary saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and kilojoules. When looking at products the Nutrition Information Panel (NIP) and the ingredients list provides the simplest and easiest way to choose the healthiest items.

## Nutrition Information Panel (NIP)

- The NIP displays the nutrients in a standard format, providing amounts per serve and per 100g (or 100ml if liquid) of the food
- It provides information on the amount of energy (kilojoules), protein, total fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars and sodium (salt), as well as any other nutrient about which a claim is made (eg fibre, iron, calcium)

*While nutrition content claims can generally guide you to healthier choices, it is important to check the claim by looking at the NIP.*

### Example: Baked savoury goods NIP

Servings per package: 6

Average serving size: 16 biscuits (35g)

	Per serve 16 biscuits (35g)	Per 100g
Energy (KJ)	770kJ	2195kJ
Protein	5.2g	14.8g
Total fat	8.8g	25.1g
Saturated fat	3.9g	11.1g
Carbohydrate	20.4g	58.1g
Sugars	1.1g	3.2g
Dietary fibre	1.4g	4.0g
Sodium	238mg	678mg

## Ingredients list

- All ingredients in a food product must be listed on the label in order, starting with the ingredient present in the largest amount and proceeding down to the ingredient present in the lowest amount
- Use this to check the first three ingredients for items high in saturated fat, sodium (salt) or added sugar.

*For example, a label that states: flour, potato, salt, flavouring; has more flour than any other ingredient but is still high in salt.*

## Nutrition information and serving sizes

- When comparing nutrients in similar food products use the per 100g column. If calculating how much of a nutrient, or how many kilojoules you will actually eat, use the per serve column
- Check whether the portion size is the same as the serve size. The serve quoted on some food and drink labels may not be the same as the serving size children are being given.

*The example above shows how to accurately assess the nutrient content of the serving size rather than the average serving size on the NIP.*



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## Step 1

Look at the 'per serve' column for the following nutrients:

- Energy (kilojoules)
- Total fat
- Sodium

## Step 2

Determine your serve size:

- You may be consuming 24 biscuits as a serve
- This is one and a half times the serve on the label, i.e  $16 \times 1.5 = 24$  biscuits

## Step 3

Calculate the nutrient amounts in your serving size:

- Energy:  $770\text{kJ} \times 1.5 \text{ serves} = 1155\text{kJ}$ 
  - Total fat:  $8.8\text{g} \times 1.5 = 13.2\text{g}$
  - Sodium:  $238\text{mg} \times 1.5 = 357\text{mg}$

## How much is too much?

The energy, fat and sodium requirements vary depending on age and activity level. To see what you require head to the [Eat for Health](#) website

**What to look for?** Fat, sugar and salt can masquerade under many different names.



### Fat

butter, oil or monoglycerides  
animal fat/oil, beef fat,  
butter, chocolate, milk  
solids, coconut, coconut  
oil/milk/cream, cophera,  
cream, ghee, dripping, lard,  
suet, palm oil, sour cream,  
vegetable shortening.

### Sugar

dextrose, fructose,  
glucose, golden syrup,  
honey, maple syrup,  
sucrose, malt, maltose,  
lactose, brown sugar,  
caster sugar, maple  
syrup, raw sugar,  
sucrose.

### Salt

baking powder, celery salt,  
garlic salt, meat/yeast extract,  
monosodium glutamate, (MSG),  
onion salt, rock salt, sea salt,  
sodium, sodium ascorbate,  
sodium bicarbonate, sodium  
nitrate/nitrite, stock cubes,  
vegetable salt.

Sources: National Health and Medical Research Council Eat for Health; The Federation of Canteens in Schools (FOCIS), 1997.



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