

# Food labels



NSW Food Authority

safer food, clearer choices

A person with dark hair tied back, wearing a denim jacket and light-colored pants, is seen from behind, pushing a green shopping cart through a grocery store aisle. The shelves are stocked with various food products, including boxes and bags. The lighting is warm and yellowish.

## Why do we have food labels?

Food labels provide information to help us make healthier and safer food choices. They do the following:

- Tell us which nutrients, in what amounts, are in a product
- Warn us if a food contains food allergens
- Inform us if the food is fresh or out of date
- When necessary, explain how to store, prepare or cook the food we buy
- List product ingredients
- Give us information on where the food was produced and which company has marketed it

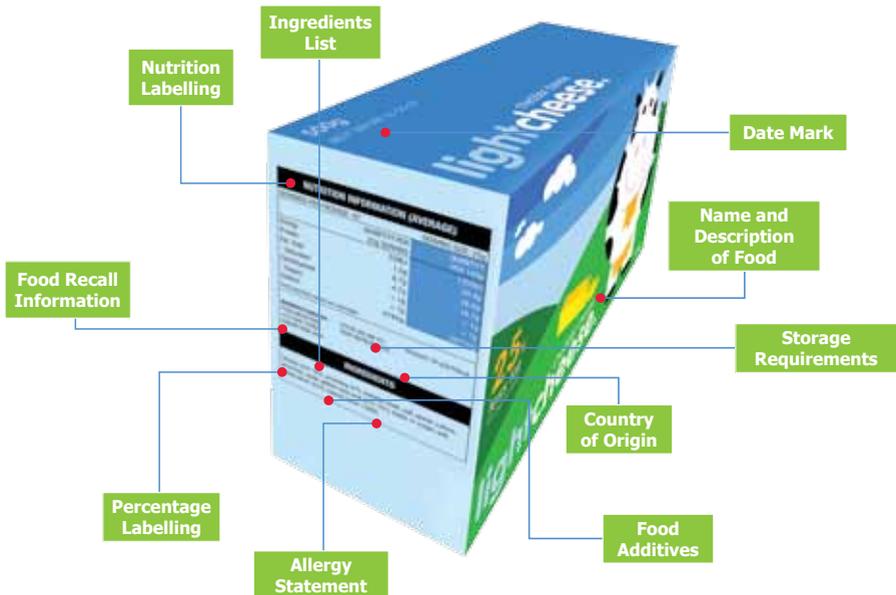
Essentially, food labels are there to provide us with basic information about what is in the food we eat and how best to handle it.

## What information must be included on a food label?

In Australia, all food labels must conform to the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. The Food Standards Code states that all food labels must identify the following information:

- Name and description of the food
- Identification of the lot number (food recall information)
- Name and Australian street address of the supplier of food (food recall information)
- List of ingredients
- Date mark
- Nutrition information panel (NIP)
- Country of origin of the food
- Warning and advisory statements

## Where can you find this information on a food label?



## Name and description of food

All food labels must give a name for the food which is either prescribed by the Food Standards Code, eg infant formula, or is a name/description that describes the true nature of the food, eg cheese spread. Under Fair Trading and Food laws, these names must be accurate and not misinform or deceive the consumer.

**A food with a picture of a banana on the label must contain bananas. If it contained banana flavouring rather than real bananas, it must be labelled as 'banana-flavoured'.**

## Ingredients list

Ingredients are always listed from greatest to smallest by how much they weigh (including any added water) at the time they are added to the product.

Where there are small amounts of multi-component ingredients (under 5%) labels may list the composite ingredient only, eg tomato sauce, rather than listing the ingredients contained in the sauce itself.

However, any additive within a composite ingredient, performing a function in the final food, eg a preservative, must be listed.

### INGREDIENTS

Whole milk, concentrated skim milk, sugar, strawberries (9%), gelatine, culture, thickener (1442).

### Characterising ingredients

Sometimes within ingredients lists, you'll see a percentage in brackets next to a particular ingredient, eg apples (26%). This is known as characterising ingredient labelling and lists the proportion of the ingredient/component included in your chosen product, ie what percentage of your apple pie is apple. Remember, apple-flavoured means just that! If it's labelled as 'flavoured' you may not find actual apples in the ingredients list at all.

The declaration of the characterising ingredient is required when that ingredient has been highlighted, in words or pictorially, on the labels or advertisement.



## Nutrition labelling

Nutrition information helps you keep track of what you're eating and enables you to choose between different products to get the best one for you. The nutrition information panel (NIP) helps you compare key nutrients and serving sizes while some food labels will also include information on percentage daily intake and nutrition claims too.

### Nutrition Information Panel (NIP)

Use these panels to compare the key nutrient contents, eg salt (sodium), sugar, carbohydrate and fat, of the food you buy to make sure you get the best balance for your dietary needs.

The Authority has produced a wallet card explaining how to correctly read the nutrition information panel on food products. You can order copies of these cards by phoning 1300 552 406.

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	18.6g	12.4g	
- Sugars	18.6g	12.4g	
Sodium	90mg	60mg	



## Comparing products using Quantity per Serving and Quantity per 100g

If you want to compare two similar products it's best to check if they have the same serving sizes first. If not, then compare the nutrient content (eg grams of fat) using the Quantity per 100g column to ensure you're comparing like with like.

**If 20 grams of fat is listed in the 'per 100g' column, this means the product is 20% fat and a high fat food.**

It's also a good idea to keep an eye on how many serves there are in the pack. If you only eat half the serve amount, then you'll need to halve the quantity per serving values shown. Similarly, if you eat two serves, you'll need to double the same values.

## Percentage daily intake

Some food products also list percentage daily intake information. You may find this within the nutrition information panel, eg 6.4g of dietary fibre is 21.3% of your daily intake, or pulled out separately as 'this food contains 21.3% of your daily fibre needs'.

Percentage daily intake refers to how much an average adult male should eat in one day. Most women and children would need less than this, eg a food which provides 10% of the recommended kilojoules for an adult male may provide 20% of the recommended kilojoules for a child.

## Nutrition claims

Nutrition claims appear frequently on food labels. Some common ones you may have seen include 'low fat', 'reduced salt' or 'good source of calcium'.

Currently, many of these nutrition claims are managed through a voluntary code, which meets specific criteria set by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Manufacturers should not make specific claims such as 'low in fat', 'high in fibre', 'reduced sugar' unless they meet these criteria.

- **Low Fat foods** = 3g of fat or less per 100g
- **Reduced Fat foods** = 25% less fat than the regular product and at least 3g or less fat per 100g
- **Low Salt foods** = 120mg of sodium or less per 100g

While nutrition claims are useful guides, you should still check the nutrition information panel. Even if a food says 'low in fat', it could still be very high in salt.

## Health claims

Health claims are statements that link eating a specific food with reducing the risk of an illness or disease, eg 'eating low fat yoghurt reduces your risk of osteoporosis'. Currently, it is illegal to use health claims in Australia. The only exception to this is food with added folate. Manufacturers are allowed to state that eating folate just before conception and during pregnancy helps to reduce the risk of spina bifida in babies.

For more information on nutrition and the current prohibition of health claims visit [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

## Food additives

Food additives are used for many reasons including making processed foods easier to use, more flavoursome, or ensuring food is preserved safely. Some food additives are naturally derived, others are from synthetic sources.

All food additives must be approved by FSANZ after rigorous assessment to check their safety. They must also be used in the lowest quantity possible to still perform their specific use. Commonly used food additives include emulsifiers, flavour enhancers, preservatives, food acids, colouring and raising agents.

**Food additives are listed in the ingredients list by their functional name and also by a number or chemical name, eg flavour enhancer (621 or monosodium glutamate).**

## Allergen, advisory and warning statements

If a food contains one of the eight most common food allergens – crustaceans, eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, soybeans, tree nuts, sesame seeds and their products – in an ingredient or compound ingredient, then it must be declared on the label no matter how small the amount. This declaration usually appears in the ingredient list. Sometimes food can also inadvertently contain traces of an ingredient from the harvesting, storage or processing equipment. If this is the case, the manufacturer may voluntarily include a warning, eg ‘may contain traces of nuts’.

Separate advisory statements must be made on the label for the following ingredients:

- Aspartame – ‘contains phenylalanine’
- Added caffeine in cola drinks – ‘contains caffeine’
- Guarana – ‘contains caffeine’
- Quinine – ‘contains quinine’
- Unpasteurised egg products – ‘unpasteurised’

The eight most common food allergens, gluten and sulphites must always be listed in the ingredients list or in a separate advisory statement. Products containing Royal Jelly must also provide a warning statement on the food label.

**Look for warning statements like ‘contains peanuts’ or ‘contains dairy products’, or ‘starch (wheat)’.**

These warning statements exist to protect people with food allergies, sensitivities or intolerances from unknowingly exposing themselves to potential health risks.

For further information on food allergies and intolerances, including labelling requirements, visit:

[www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/problems-with-food/allergy-and-intolerance](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/problems-with-food/allergy-and-intolerance)

Alternatively, you can order our Food Allergy and Intolerance brochures or Allergen Cards by phoning 1300 552 406.



## Date mark

Food labels have date marks to tell us about the shelf life of foods. These date marks help us tell how long food can be kept before it begins to deteriorate.

All food with a shelf life of less than two years must be date marked. Many canned foods, such as baked beans, are not date marked, because they are safe and keep their quality for over two years.

### Use-by date

Foods must be eaten or thrown away by this date.

- After this date, foods may be unsafe to eat even if they look fine because the nutrients in the food may become unstable or a build-up of bacteria may occur
- It is illegal to sell foods after their 'use-by' date has expired

### Best before date

Foods are still safe to eat after this date as long as they are not damaged, deteriorated or perished.

- The 'best before' date simply indicates that the product may have lost some of its quality after this date passes
- Foods can be legally sold after the best before date (as long as they are not damaged, deteriorated or perished)
- You can expect these foods to retain their colour, taste, texture and flavour as long as they are stored correctly

## Storage and preparation requirements

To make sure a food keeps safe, it's important to follow storage instructions, such as 'Keep refrigerated' and 'Store in a cool, dark place'.

**If a product requires specific storage instructions to remain safe and wholesome until its 'use-by' or 'best before' date, manufacturers have to include this information on the label.**

To enjoy your food and avoid food poisoning, it's also important to follow any preparation or cooking instructions shown on the label, including heating and defrosting times. Manufacturers must provide preparation directions on food labels for any foods which require specific preparation to ensure they are safe.

Following these instructions is extremely important because they help you to kill any harmful bacteria which may be present naturally in some foods.

## Country of origin

Country of origin labelling describes the country or countries where your food was grown, manufactured or packaged.

All packaged food must be identified as having been made from imported or local produce or a mixture of both.

### Product of Australia

'Product of Australia', 'Produced in Australia' and 'Produce of Australia' mean that all significant ingredients used in the food originated in Australia and that the food is also manufactured in Australia.

### Made in Australia

'Made in Australia' and 'Manufactured in Australia' can only be used if the food has been significantly changed or processed in Australia. At least 50% of the cost of production must also have been incurred in Australia.



## **Food recall information**

Food labels are legally required to show the name and Australian business address of the manufacturer or supplier (packer or vendor importer) plus the lot and batch number of the food (or date coding) to enable efficient food recalls. Food is recalled when it poses a possible public health and safety risk to consumers.

To find out more about food recalls visit

[www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/problems-with-food/recalls](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/problems-with-food/recalls)

## **What if I have a food labelling complaint?**

If you find a product that you think is inaccurately labelled or being sold after its use-by date, contact the store manager.

If you think use-by dates have been deliberately altered, scratched out or another sticker placed over the original, raise it with the store manager and contact the NSW Food Authority on 1300 552 406.

The NSW Food Authority will take action against any retailer that knowingly sells unsafe food, or sells food beyond its use-by date.



Useful websites on food labelling:

**NSW Food Authority**

[www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/food-labels](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/food-labels)

**Food Standards Australia New Zealand**

[www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

**Nutrition Australia**

[www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)

**Dieticians Association of Australia**

[www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

**Anaphylaxis Australia**

[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

To obtain copies of the NIP wallet card and other publications produced by the Authority, or for further information and advice:

Visit: [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)

Contact: 1300 552 406