

# Reading food labels

## Kōrerotia ngā tapanga kai

If you buy packaged foods, learning how to read and understand food labels can help you make healthier choices. Follow these tips when you're shopping to choose which brand or variety to buy.

### Check the nutrition information panel

Most packaged foods must have a nutrition information panel.

There are two columns on the nutrition information panel. One panel lists the amount of nutrients "per serve", the other lists the amount "per 100 g" (or 100 ml if liquid).

Use the 100 g column to compare similar foods and choose healthier products.

Always compare products in the same category. For example, bread versus bread.

Use the 10, 10, 5 rule to choose which product to buy:

- less than 10 g of fat
- less than 10 g of sugar
- more than 5 g of fibre.

You can also think of this as less is best for fat and sugar, more is better for fibre.

**Reading a nutrition information panel**

Choose foods with less energy (kilojoules) if you need to lose weight.

Use the "per 100g" column to compare foods.

Nutrition information		
Servings per pack: 24		
Serving size: 30 g (2 biscuits)		
	Per serving	Per 100 g
<b>Energy (kj)</b>	444	1480
<b>Protein (g)</b>	3.6	12.0
<b>Fat, Total (g)</b>	0.4	<b>1.4</b>
- Saturated (g)	0.1	0.3
<b>Carbohydrate, Total (g)</b>	20.1	67.0
- Sugars (g)	0.8	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Dietary fibre (g)</b>	3.0	<b>10.1</b>
<b>Sodium (mg)</b>	81	<b>270</b>

Choose foods with **less than 10 g of fat** per 100 g.

Choose foods with **less than 10 g of sugar** per 100 g.

Choose foods with **more than 5 g of fibre** per 100 g.

Choose foods with **less than 400 mg of sodium** per 100 g.

The Healthy Food Guide's supermarket shopping guide gives more information about what to look for on the labels of particular foods. Go to [www.healthyfood.co.nz](http://www.healthyfood.co.nz) > Expert advice > resources > guides and planners > supermarket and pantry staple guide.



### Check the ingredient list

You can usually find the ingredient list on the back of packaged food. Ingredients are listed in order from the largest to the smallest amount. So, if fat, sugar or salt are near the top of the list, the food is unlikely to be a healthy choice.

Sugar and fat are often listed in the ingredient list under different names.

Common names for sugar added to foods are corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, sucrose, maltose, honey, invert sugar, golden syrup, maple syrup and treacle.

Common names for fat added to foods are butter, coconut cream, cream, hydrogenated vegetable fat, lard, margarine, oil, trans fats, triglycerides and vegetable oil.

### Practise reading labels at home

Read the labels on the food in your pantry before you head out to the supermarket. Get an idea of the healthy choices you already have and the foods you need to find a healthier alternative for.

Once you get to know which options are healthy, you'll only need to check labels if you want to try a new product, different brand or a supermarket special you haven't tried before.

### Use the FoodSwitch smartphone app

The free FoodSwitch app lets you scan the barcodes of packaged foods with your smartphone camera. It then gives you easy-to-understand nutritional advice and a list of similar foods that are healthier choices.

### Look for Health Stars on the front of packaged food

Health Stars are a quick and easy way for you to choose healthier packaged foods. Health Stars rate the nutrition content of packaged food from half a star to five stars.

But the system isn't perfect. The system is designed to give more stars to healthier foods. But some foods with ratings of three or more stars aren't really healthy choices.

The best way to tell if a food is a healthy choice is to check the nutrition information panel and follow the rest of the advice on this page.



*Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed April 2020. Last updated September 2021.*