



Label savvy

Becoming label savvy is necessary as we live in times when more and more foods are pre prepared and packaged with labels. When it comes to reading food labels, things often seem confusing. Ensuring you're getting the best possible diet isn't always easy, as basic nutrition information is not always mandatory on food labels. However, with a little bit of simple detective work you can learn how to quickly and effectively assess a food item based on the information found on its label!

Information you normally find displayed on the food label:

1. **The Ingredients list:** Where there is no nutrition information table, an ingredients list can be useful. It is law that all food products must have an ingredients list. Each ingredient is listed in descending order of predominance. This means that the first ingredient on the list is what the product mainly contains, and at the end of the list are the ingredients that are present in the least amounts. Try to stay away from foods which have sugar, butter, salt or hydrogenated fat appearing at the top of the ingredients list. Likewise if salt, is right at the bottom of the list, you can assume that it is included in a relatively low amount.

2. **Serving size:** Gives an indication of the item's suggested serving. This figure is normally standardised to make the comparison of similar foods easier. To find out how many servings the container contains (i.e. how many times you'll be able to eat a full serving), simply divide the mass of the product, e.g. 500 g, by the serving size, e.g. 50 g. That gives you 10 servings.

3. **Kilojoules / Calories:** Indicates the amount of energy you receive from a serving, or per 100g. It is measured in calories (kcal), or kilojoules (kJ). Remember, it is your portion. If you're trying to maintain a healthy weight, choose the product with the lowest calorie or kilojoule value per 100g.

DID YOU KNOW: 1 calorie = 4.2 kilojoules.

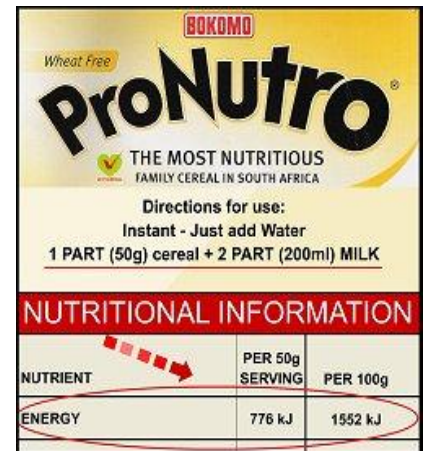
4. **Fats:** Some food labels divide fat content into saturated, monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and trans fat. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats provide us with the essential fatty acids that the body needs. Remember to limit foods which are high in saturated fat or trans fats.

5. **Sodium.** Salt is often mentioned as sodium on food labels.

To calculate the salt content of foods, you must multiply the sodium content by 2.5 (salt = sodium x 2.5). It is estimated that about three quarters of the salt we eat comes from processed food, such as soups, sauces and ready meals. Adults should have no more than 6 grams of salt each day.

Nutrition claim: "Sodium free" is less than 0.005g sodium. "Low sodium" would be 0.14g or less sodium per serving.

6. **Carbohydrates/sugars:** Simple carbohydrates are often listed on food labels as % carbohydrates of which sugars. These include sugars which have been added, and also the natural sugars found in certain foods. You should aim to get most of your energy from high fibre carbohydrates, rather than those containing simple sugars.



7. Dietary fibre: good sources of fibre include wholegrain breakfast cereals (All bran flakes), kidney beans, mixed unsalted nuts, wholewheat /seed bread, baked beans, fruit and vegetables.

Nutrition claim: “Souce of fibre” must be 2g, or more; “high in fibre” must be 4g, or more per serving.

8. Allergy advice: Labels often contain information to alert anyone who has a food allergy or intolerance, identifying any ingredients, which they may need to avoid. This may include advice on foods containing milk, nuts, gluten, and soya. If you have an allergy or food intolerance, it is recommended that you see a dietician for personal guidance and advice.

How to choose a smart snack by reading the label:

- Less than 500kJ per portion/snack
- < 20g carbohydrate
- < 20g protein
- < 5g total fat

What to look out for on labels:

- ✔ Take note of the two most important health considerations: energy and fat.
- ✔ Aim for products that have less than 5g of fat per 100g for solids and less than 1.5g per 100ml for liquids OR when one serving contains 3 grams of fat or less.
- ✔ Trans free products should contain less than 0.1g per 100g/ml. It is important to remember to watch the saturated fat level as often, when trans fats are removed, saturated fat levels go up.
- ✔ To be low in cholesterol a food should contain no more than 20mg per 100g or 10mg per 100ml and to be considered cholesterol-free it should have less than 5mg per 100g/ml. The goal is to have less than 300mg of cholesterol per day.
- ✔ If you have high blood pressure or want to manage your salt intake, consider the sodium values.
- ✔ Keep your salt (sodium chloride) intake to less than 6g per day, which is equal to one teaspoon of salt from all sources. If you are restricting sodium then aim for less than 2g per day.

There really is an abundance of information on our food labels. And they can make a huge difference; not only to the way you shop, but more importantly to the way you eat. The information has already been provided, so it's merely a matter of using it wisely to make healthy food choices.