

DECODING FOOD LABELS

Knowing about what you eat is an important part of looking after your health and wellbeing. Food labels carry information about the food such as the nutrition panel, ingredient list, allergens, country of origin and advisory statements. Most manufactured foods need a label, with a few exceptions such as those sold in very small packages¹. It's good to remember that some of the healthiest food may not have a label, such as fruit, vegetables and fresh meat.

UNDERSTANDING THE NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL

Nutrition information panels are displayed on the packaging of most food and drink. Some exceptions include foods in small packages, tea, coffee, alcohol, herbs and spices. Nutrition information is listed per serve as well as per 100g or 100mL.

Let's take a look at the mandatory features of the nutrition information panel in the yogurt label below.

Energy - Use the per 100g column to compare the energy in similar food products. If you're watching your weight this will help you to choose products with the lowest kilojoules.

Total fat – foods are considered low in fat if they have 3g or less total fat per 100g. This yogurt is low fat as it has just 0.1g fat per 100g.

Saturated fat –This type of fat raises blood cholesterol, so the simple rule is – the lower the amount, the better. This product here has 0.1g of saturated fat per 100g which is low.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
SERVINGS PER TWIN PACK: 2		
SERVING SIZE: 200g		
AV.QTY PER SERVE 200g	AV.QTY PER 100g	
ENERGY	337kJ 81Cal	168kJ 40Cal
PROTEIN	8.8g	4.4g
FAT, TOTAL	0.2g	0.1g
– SATURATED	0.2g	0.1g
CARBOHYDRATE:	10.4g	5.2g
– SUGARS	9.6g	4.8g
SODIUM	85mg	42mg
CALCIUM	219mg (27%RDI*)	110mg
POTASSIUM	301mg	151mg

*RECOMMENDED DIETARY INTAKE

Carbohydrates – include both starches and sugars in a food.

Sugars – include both naturally occurring (from fruit and milk) as well as added sugars. Low sugar products have 5g sugar or less per 100g.

Sodium – is a component of salt. It is found in many foods including both processed and fresh foods. Foods are considered to be low in sodium if they contain 120mg or less per 100g.



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DECODING FOOD LABELS(continued)

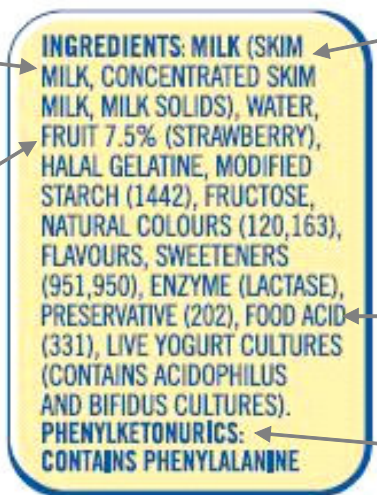
HOW DO I INTERPRET OTHER INFORMATION ON THE LABEL?

Ingredient list

Ingredients are listed in order from highest to lowest by weight. Milk is the first ingredient in this yogurt, which means it's the main ingredient. To estimate the amount of a particular ingredient in a product, check its position in the ingredient list.

Labels must tell the truth

Suppliers must give details about the food that are not misleading. For example, this label says strawberry yogurt, so the product must contain a minimum amount of strawberries. The ingredient list on this yogurt shows that it has 7.5% strawberries.



Allergen declarations

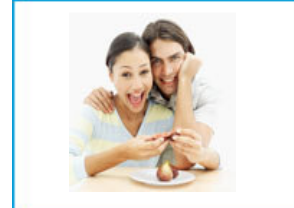
Allergens must be declared on food labels. This is good news for people with allergies to nuts, seafood, milk, gluten or eggs. The milk in this yogurt is declared in the ingredient list and is a potential allergen to people with milk protein allergy.

Food additives

These perform a variety of functions in food and are identified in the ingredients list by a number. As well as declaring the additive number, this yogurt also lists its function e.g. Food acid (331).

Advisory statements

Are required if a food contains ingredients that may pose a potential health risk for certain people. This yogurt contains a warning for people with phenylketonuria (PKU), because the product contains phenylalanine which needs to be restricted in the diet of people with PKU.



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References

1. FSANZ Food labelling. <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodmatters/foodlabelling.cfm> 2006
2. FSANZ. Food Labels what do they mean? 2006