

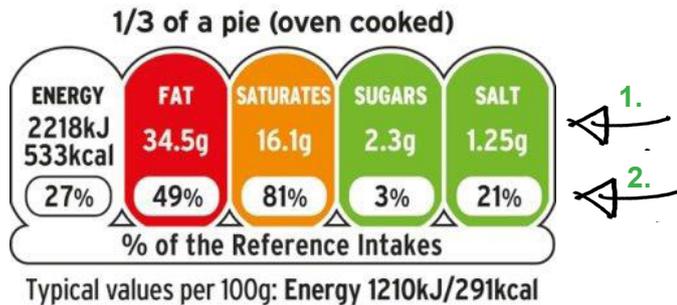
## Food labelling

Any food you can buy must carry true, clear and easy to understand information.

A food label contains information about the:

- weight of the food
- ingredients it contains
- ingredients that might cause allergy or intolerance
- storage conditions
- country of origin information (for fresh, chilled and frozen meat of sheep, pigs, goats and poultry from April 2015).

The label also has information on parts of the food that are important to health – these are called ‘nutrients’ and the information about them is called ‘nutritional information’. This fact sheet will look at this nutritional information and help you to understand it.



### Front of pack labels

To help you make a quick decision, a number of manufacturers and supermarkets have added a label on the front of pack.

This label clearly shows the nutrients that are important for health. It will help you compare different food choices, help you balance your diet, and control the amount of energy (calories) you eat. The label will show you:

1. The amount of the nutrient in a portion of the food – information on the number of grams of energy (in kJ and kcal) and the nutrients sugar, fat, saturates and salt in a serving or portion of the food.
2. The percentage of your diet this will contribute to – reference intakes (RIs)\* are guidelines about the amount of these nutrients and energy required for a healthy diet.

The label gives the amount in a portion of the food as a percentage of the RI for an adult of each nutrient.

3. The colours **green**, **amber** and **red** show if a food is low (green), medium (amber) or high (red) for the amount of energy and these nutrients in a portion.

\*RIs have replaced guideline daily amounts (GDAs), which used to appear on food labels. But the basic principle behind these two terms is the same. Unless the label says otherwise, RI values are based on an average-sized woman doing an average amount of physical activity.

Take care – labels refer to a portion size that may be smaller than you are eating e.g. the label may refer to one biscuit but they come in packets of four, so make sure you read carefully and multiply the information if you are eating more than the portion size stated.

Try to choose foods that show green or amber for the majority of the ‘front of pack’ nutrients. If a food contains a red label try to limit the number of times you eat this food.

### Nutritional information – back of pack label

Nutritional information is listed on the back (or side) of a food packet. Manufacturers do not have to put nutritional labelling on their products, but it is included on the majority of pre-packaged foods and it will be a mandatory from 13 December 2016. Where nutritional information is listed it must include the following nutrients that are important to health. These nutrients will be listed on the label as: energy, in calories (kcal) and joules (kJ) – the European measure of energy); fat, saturates, carbohydrates, sugars, protein and salt.

### Summary

The nutritional information on a food label is there to help you understand what is in the food that you are eating. This can help you make choices that will affect your health. The new consistent food labelling system will make it easier for you to compare foods and make sure you are getting a healthy balanced diet.

**Further information:** Food Fact Sheets on other topics including Carbohydrates, Fat, Healthy Eating, Salt, and Sugar are available at:

[www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts)

**Turn over for a detailed view of a back of pack label.**

## Energy

is listed as kilojoules (kJ) and kilocalories (kcal). Kilojoules are the measure of energy used in Europe - they are the metric equivalent of calories (like kilogrammes (kg) is the metric equivalent of pounds (lb) when looking at weight). Although we say 'calories' in the UK we are technically referring to kilo calories. You will see these values listed as kcal and kJ.

**1 kilo calorie = 4.2 kilo joules**

## Fat

The total amount of fat is important to our health. All types of fat contain the same amount of energy.

## Saturates

is the term used in labelling for saturated fat (sometimes called 'sat fat'). In the UK, our diets are too high in saturated fat (found in lard, butter, fats on meat and fatty meat products, pastries, cakes, biscuits, full-fat dairy foods and take-aways), and it is this type of fat that causes a rise in cholesterol levels. Raised levels of cholesterol are linked to heart disease so we need to try and eat less saturated fats.

The label may also show how much of the total fat in the food is in the form of other fats (e.g. mono unsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fat). These fats (generally found in plant foods such as seeds/grains, nuts, vegetables and fruit) are a better choice as they do not cause cholesterol levels to rise and so may protect against heart disease.

## Salt

Salt is found naturally in many foods like meat and vegetables but is also added to foods to improve taste and shelf life. In fact we can get all the salt our bodies need from natural sources and we don't need to add it to our food. Adults should eat no more than 6g salt/day (children only 2-5g depending on their age).



Energy	kJ/kcal
Fat	g
Saturates	g
Carbohydrate	g
Sugars	g
Protein	g
Salt	g

The label will give the nutritional information for 100g of product. This makes it possible to make comparisons between foods. In addition the nutritional information can provide information per portion of food to help you know just how much you are eating in a single portion of the food. The order of the list of nutrients will always be the same: energy, fat, saturates, carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt.

Other nutrients may be listed – for example fibre, monounsaturated fat, vitamins or minerals – but these will always be in addition to the list in the table above.

## Carbohydrates

Includes both complex carbohydrates found in starchy foods (bread, potatoes, etc) and simple carbohydrates e.g. sugars. Half of our energy should come from foods that contain complex carbohydrates such as bread, potatoes, pasta and rice.

## Sugars

To help us recognise when a food contains sugars rather than starch the extra category of sugars is often included on the label. This term covers all types of sugars including added sugar (sucrose/table sugar) and sugars that are a natural part of a food e.g. lactose (milk sugar) and fructose (fruit sugar). Having just one description for sugars can be confusing. Natural sugars in milk (lactose) and in fruit (fructose) contain as much energy as other sugars but do not cause dental disease. (If fruit juice is extracted from the whole fruit the sugar is more exposed to teeth and can cause dental caries. It is the frequency with which sugar can 'attack' teeth that is important. For this reason fruit juice is only recommended as part of a meal.) We need to reduce the amount of added sugar in food. This is because sugars that are added to foods only provide energy and no other nutrients helpful to our health. Added sugar also cause dental disease. Some foods may also be labelled 'contains natural sugars' to show that some of the sugar content is from natural forms.

## Protein

is needed for cell repair and growth. In the UK the majority of us eat sufficient protein. Any extra protein we eat is used as energy for the body.