

# QUICK GUIDE ON READING YOUR FOOD LABELS

Reading food labels can aid in weight-loss and it is also beneficial to know what you eating, especially if you have Diabetes or diagnosed with Hypertension. The food labels will also give you lots of information on the ingredients found in the specific food.



## 1. Look at the ingredients list:

- Ingredients are listed in order of quantity; thus the main ingredients are listed first (in percentage %).
- Look at the ingredients list to make sure the “good” ingredients are listed high and the “bad” ingredients are listed lower. For instance cranberry bar may contain cranberries which have anti-oxidant properties – but it is 60% made of nougat (which is mostly sugar).

**INGREDIENTS:** Nougat 60% [Glucose syrup, sugar, dried cranberries (18%) (cranberries, sugar, vegetable oil [sunflower seed]), honey (11%), egg white, wafer paper (potato starch, vegetable oil (palm fruit), water), vanilla flavouring], Chocolate 40% [Cocoa mass, sugar, cocoa butter, emulsifier: soya lecithin, vanilla flavouring]. Chocolate contains cocoa solids 55% minimum. Contains: Egg, Soya. May contain traces of tree nuts and dairy.

## 2. Look at the nutritional analysis:

A nutritional analysis table shows how much energy, macronutrients (like carbohydrate, protein and fat), fibre and micronutrients (like vitamins and minerals, including sodium) are in your food.

### a. Single serving size vs 100ml/100g

- Always look at the single serving size per package (one packet may have 2 or 3 servings in)
- If you want to compare foods, use the 100ml or 100g column (because serving sizes for different products are different)

## b. Energy

- Energy of the food product is the amount kilojoules (kj) or calories that it contains.
- 1kcal = 4.2kj
- If you want to lose weight – the amount of energy you consume must be less than the amount of energy you use during the day

## c. Protein

- Protein is the portion of food which we need to build muscle
- 1g of protein contains 17kj

## d. Fat

- Fat is needed for energy, essential fatty acid production, functioning of nerves, functioning of the brain, cell membrane production and transport of fat-soluble vitamins
- Saturated fats and trans fats can be unhealthy for our bodies.
- 1g of fat contains 38kj
- Fat-free products should have <0.5g fat per serving
- Low-fat products should have <3g fat per serving

## e. Fibre

- Fibre is a complex carbohydrate, but unlike other carbohydrates, fibre cannot be digested by the body.
- Fibre keeps you fuller for longer, it regulated blood glucose levels and can decrease cholesterol.
- You get two types of fibre:
  - Soluble: Forms a gel-like substance in your colon. (Oats, barley, beans, peas, fruit and vegetables)
  - Insoluble: Absorbs water and provides bulk and moisture to stools. (wholegrain bread, corn, nuts and the skin of fruit/vegetables)
- Food high in fibre contains > 5g of fibre per serving

## f. Sodium

- The most common form of sodium is table salt (sodium chloride).
- Sodium is also added to cured meats and processed foods.
- Our bodies only need 2300mg of sodium per day

## g. Sugar

- Only foods that have less than 0.5g of sugar per 100g can claim they are sugar free. Manufacturers may replace sugar with fat, to make sure that it still tastes nice.
- Sugar is seen as an empty calorie
- No added sugar does not mean it is sugar free, or necessarily low in sugar, just that no extra sugar has been added

**YOUR BEST CHOICES ARE: LOW IN SUGAR, HIGH IN FIBRE AND LOW IN FAT**

## 3. Allergens

The legislation in South Africa looks after the growing number of us who suffer from food allergies and intolerances. Common allergens, including things like egg, cow's milk, gluten and peanuts, **MUST** be listed on a product's packaging.



  
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