



Health & Wellbeing Bulletin

Understanding Food labels

Labels on food products tell us about their ingredients and sometimes their nutritional values. A label is often the only source of information we have about the product. Therefore, it is extremely important that all food labels are clear and easily understood.

By law in Ireland, food labels should:

- Be clear, legible and written in at least English or both English or Irish
- Avoid displaying confusing or misleading information
- Avoid covering or hiding the label behind a picture or written information

This bulletin aims to look at the common claims that are found on food labels and explain what exactly they mean.

- **Energy:** Energy in food is measured in calories or kilojoules, written as kcal or kJ. Eating more energy than needed can lead to weight gain.
- **Carbohydrate:** Their function is to provide us with energy. They include sugars such as sweets and cake and starches such as bread and rice.
- **Fat:** The total amount of fat in a food including saturates (bad fats), polyunsaturates and mono unsaturates (unsaturated fats/good fats which can also lower blood cholesterol).

When looking at food labels check whether the fat is saturated or unsaturated.

- **Fibre:** This is the total amount of fibre or roughage in a food, essential for the proper functioning of the digestive tract.
- **Salt:** This may be listed as 'sodium' (1g of sodium = 2.5g of salt). We should aim for less than 6g of salt, that is 1 teaspoon a day.

Terms on food labels, what do they mean?

Sugar

- **"Reduced Sugar"** 30% less sugars than the standard product
- **"Low Sugar"** less than 5g sugar per 100g
- **"Sugar Free"** Contains no more than 0/5g sugar per 100g
- **"No added Sugar"** No sugars have been added, but the product may have natural sugars present.
- **"Of which sugars"** shows how much of the total carbohydrate comes from sugars

Fat

- **"Low Fat"** Less than 3g fat in 100g
- **"% Fat"** The amount of fat in 100g
- **"95% Fat"** Product contains 5% fat (or 5g per 100g)
- **"Reduced Fat / Light"** 30% less fat than the standard product

"Virtually Fat Free" Less than 0.5g fat per 100g

"Low in Saturates" 1.5g of Saturates per 100g

"High in Polyunsaturates" At least 45% of fat is Polyunsaturated

Fibre

"High Fibre" Contains at least 6g of fibre per 100g

"Source of Fibre" Contains at least 3g of fibre per 100g

Sodium

"Reduced Sodium" 30% less sodium than the standard product

"Low Sodium" Less than 0.04g of sodium per 100g/0.1g of salt per 100g

Calories

"Reduced Calorie" 30% less calories than the standard product

"Low Calorie" Less than 40kcal per 100g

Quick guide to food labelling per 100g

10g of Sugar is a lot - 2g of Sugar is a little

20g of Fat is a lot - 3g of Fat is a little

5g of Saturates is a lot - 1g of Saturates is a little

1.5g of Salt/0.6g of sodium is a lot - 0.1g of Salt/0.04g of Sodium is a little

Terms to look out for:

Made from: This means that the food started with this but it could have gone through a lot of processes before it gets to the shop shelves

Made with real fruit/whole grains etc: The label may not say exactly how much real fruit or whole grains are actually in it

Made from or made with natural ingredients: This is no great claim, most processed foods are made from natural ingredients

Terms like "organically grown" "Organic" "Pesticide Free": Trust only labels that say "Approved Organic Standard" with their associated logo.

Information was taken from the HSE website www.hse.ie and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland.

For further information on QUINN-healthcare's Health@Work Services please call 1890 907 088 or email och@quinn-healthcare.com