

GUIDE TO FOOD LABELLING



BEATING HEART DISEASE TOGETHER

The British Heart Foundation is the nation's heart charity. We are totally committed to preventing people's lives being devastated by heart disease.



Today, more and more of us are becoming aware of how important what we eat is to our health and well-being. There's lots of information available about the value of healthy eating, but it's often difficult to work out how much of everything we should be eating to have a healthier heart. This is especially true of food labelling – all the facts and figures can be very confusing and sometimes it's hard to understand what the products we buy everyday actually contain.

We've produced this booklet to explain just what food labels mean – and to make it easier for you to choose which foods will help you, and your family, keep heart healthy.

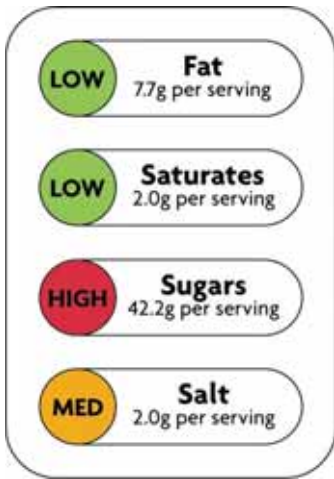
WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU GO SHOPPING

If you have coronary heart disease and/or are trying to lose weight, watching what you eat is very important. When you look at a food label, you should look at:

- the total amount of calories and fat in foods
- how much of the total fat is saturated fat
- how much salt it contains
- the ingredients it contains.

Even if you don't have coronary heart disease, eating foods which are low in fat, saturated fat and salt can help reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease in the future.





The good news is that many retailers and manufacturers now provide ‘at a glance’ nutritional information on the front of packs. For example, many are now using traffic light signposting to show you whether a food has a high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) amount of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt in 100g of the food. As well as the traffic light colours, you can also see the amount of these nutrients that are present in a portion or serving of the food.

Foods with a red light should only be eaten occasionally. Foods with amber lights are fine to eat most of the time but those with green lights are the healthiest choices. Most foods will have a mixture of red, amber and greens but when you are choosing between products, pick those with greens and ambers as much as possible.

Some labels show how much a food contributes towards your guideline daily amounts (GDAs) for key nutrients. The daily guideline amounts for the most important nutrients listed on food labels are:

	Men	Women
Fat (total)	95g	70g
of which saturates	30g	20g
Salt	6g	6g
Sugar	120g	90g

GDA's are for average adults, of normal healthy weight. In general, men need about 2,500 kcals (calories) each day and women need about 2,000 kcals. However, what you need will be different from someone else. For example, someone who is very active will need more calories than someone who is not. Someone who is trying to lose weight probably needs only 1,500kcals or 1,800kcals a day. This is the same for the other nutrients listed in the table.

Remember, GDA's are a guide, not a target and a maximum rather than a minimum. If you are a normal weight you can aim to reach the GDA for calories, but you should try to eat no more than the GDA's for sugars, fat, saturates and salt.





FAT

Eating too much fat has been linked with a greater risk of coronary heart disease. Also, the more fat you eat, the more likely you are to put on weight. People who are overweight tend to have higher blood pressure and higher blood cholesterol levels – both are bad for your heart.

The type of fat that you eat is even more important if you want to reduce your risk of heart disease. On food labels, check whether the fat is saturated or unsaturated.

Saturated fats

Tend to be hard and waxy, like cheese and butter. This is the type of fat which raises blood cholesterol, increasing your risk of a heart attack.

Unsaturated fats

(made up of monounsaturated and polyunsaturates)

Tend to be softer like margarine made from sunflower oil, or a liquid like olive oil. These can have a good effect on cholesterol levels if you use them instead of saturated fats, but try not to use too much oil at all especially if you are trying to lose weight.



Trans fats

Raise blood cholesterol levels in a similar way to saturated fats. You are unlikely to see trans fats listed in the nutritional information. However, check the ingredient list and if you see partially hydrogenated oil/fat or hydrogenated oil/fat the food may contain trans fats.

SALT (SODIUM)

On a food label, salt is often sodium, 1g of sodium is roughly the same as 2.5g of salt. It's the sodium that can lead to health problems. Eating too much salt can cause high blood pressure, increasing your risk of coronary heart disease.

Adults should not have more than 6g, that's only a teaspoonful, of salt a day. The daily recommended maximum for children depends on their age.



Age	No more than (g/day)
0-6 months	1
7-12 months	1
1-3 years	2
4-6 years	3
7-10 years	5
11-14 years	6





SUGAR

There is no direct link between sugar and coronary heart disease. But eating too many sugary foods doesn't help if you are watching your weight, especially if they are also high in fat, as in chocolate, puddings and cakes.



FIBRE

Eating fibre adds bulk to your diet and fills you up with foods that are healthy for your heart. Fibre is found in fruit, vegetables, pulses like beans and lentils, wholegrain bread and high fibre breakfast cereals.



CALORIES

Energy in food is measured in calories or kilojoules (written as kcal or kJ on food labels). If you eat more energy than you need for the amount of physical activity you do, you will become overweight.

If you are trying to lose weight, check for the amount of fat in foods. If you cut down on the fat you eat and don't compensate by taking more calories from other foods, then you will also cut down on the calories.



HOW MUCH IS A LOT OR A LITTLE?

If foods don't have a traffic light label, try using the card below to make healthier choices.

For foods you eat in large amounts, like ready meals, look at the 'amount per serving' and use the guide to judge if they contain high levels of fat, saturates, sugar or salt. For snacks, and other foods you eat in smaller amounts, look at the 'per 100g' information and use the table to choose those that fall into the green or amber categories as much as possible.



Check claims such as 'light' or 'reduced fat' with care. A bag of crisps that claims to contain 25% less fat than normal crisps may still contain a lot of fat. Look at the actual fat content on the back of the packet and see what percentage it is of your daily amount.



PUT A TRAFFIC LIGHT ON EVERY FOOD LABEL

Traffic light labels on foods make it easier to choose healthy options.

Some supermarkets are using labels with % Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) instead.

To apply traffic lights to a product, look at the 'per 100g' information panel on the pack and use this grid to make a healthier choice.

All measures per 100g	Low – a healthier choice	Medium – ok most of the time	High – just occasionally
Sugars	5g or less	5.1g – 15g	More than 15g
Fat	3g or less	3.1 – 20g	More than 20g
Saturates	1.5g or less	1.6g – 5g	More than 5g
Salt	0.30g or less	0.31g – 1.5g	More than 1.5g

For information on guidelines for children, please see our booklet *Food should be fun...and healthy!*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The British Heart Foundation also produces other resources that may be of interest. To find out about these or to order our Heart health catalogue, please go to bhf.org.uk/publications or call the **BHF Orderline on 0870 600 6566** or email orderline@bhf.org.uk

Give something back

We do not charge for our educational materials, but a donation will help us to help others.

HAVE YOUR SAY

We would welcome your comments to help us produce the best information for you. Why not let us know what you think? Contact us via our website bhf.org.uk/yoursay

WHATEVER'S ON YOUR MIND, WE'RE HERE TO HELP

As the nation's heart charity we're pioneers in heart research and it's our job to provide care and support for those living with heart disease. You don't need to be unwell to call us, you can chat to us about anything you like. Whether you need help, heart health information or if you just want to talk to someone.

HEART HELPLINE

For information and support on anything heart-related



08450 70 80 70



bhf.org.uk

Phone lines open: 9am – 5pm Mon, Tue and Fri. 8am – 6pm Wed and Thur.

References

- 1 The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (2003) Salt and Health. TSO: London. Available at <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/saltandhealth0503.pdf>

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