

# NAVIGATING FOOD LABELS

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Throughout the course you will be encouraged to reduce your reliance on processed foods and focus on eating more whole, real foods. This doesn't mean you can't include packaged foods at all. There are many packaged foods that offer us nourishment. So how do we tell what's nourishing and what's less so? Knowing how to navigate food labels can help.

Food labels can be a minefield. They're often loaded with misleading statements that lead to us to think that a product is more nourishing for us than it really is. The good news is, once you understand what to look for (and what to ignore), it becomes much simpler to gain clarity.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

### INGREDIENTS LIST

One of the first things to do is turn any package over and look at what the product is made from. You'll find this in the list of ingredients. You're looking for products that are based on whole real foods and avoid the inclusion of synthetic additives, fake food ingredients, preservatives or any other potentially problematic substances as well as poor quality oils and significant amounts of added sugar.





In Australia and New Zealand, the ingredients list on a food product must be listed in descending order by weight, which means that the ingredient that contributed most towards the makeup of the final product will be listed first in the ingredients list, and the ingredient that contributed the smallest amount to the final product will show up last in the list. So, if you see some form of sugar listed at or near the beginning of the ingredients list, you'll know that a large component of this food product is sugar.

That said, there are some tricks to watch out for. Many food products are now made using a few different types of added sugars. These different forms of sugar can be used in smaller amounts (but may add up to a large amount when combined) and would therefore be listed out separately further down in the ingredients list.

In other words, if just one form of sugar had been used instead of a combination of types, this might actually be one of the first few ingredients in the list—meaning a large proportion of the final product is sugar. So, keep an eye out for multiple forms of added sugars in the ingredients list, such as various syrups and fruit juice concentrates, words ending in “-ose”, maltodextrin, as well as table sugar.

## LET'S NOW CONSIDER THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO MUESLIS:

- **Whole food muesli ingredients list:** Sunflower seeds, coconut, sesame seeds, cashews, almonds, chia seeds, cacao nibs, coconut oil, cinnamon, vanilla extract, ginger
- **Less nourishing muesli ingredients list:** Whole grain oats (70%), dried fruits (12%) (sultanas (8%) (sultanas, cottonseed oil), apricots (3%) (apricot, humectant (glycerol), preservative (220)), apple (preservative (220)), wheat bran straws (wheat bran, wheat four, sugar, salt), nuts (7%) (almonds (5%), cashews (2%)), sunflower seeds, natural flavours

What do you notice about these two examples? Not only does the first one contain no preservatives or other ingredients that are difficult to identify (i.e. you could easily make it yourself using ingredients that might be kept in a home pantry), it also contains fewer total ingredients. While not always true, often the more nourishing choice will have fewer ingredients.

If you're reading an ingredients list and something is not clear, a wonderful rule to live by is: **If in doubt, leave it out.**



## CERTIFIED ORGANIC

It might not be possible to eat only certified organic food—please do what you can. However, the organic certification process is a stringent one and there are numerous benefits to choosing certified organic products.

The first, of course, is that you can trust the ingredients have been grown and produced minus the use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides, genetically modified ingredients or, where animal products are concerned, growth hormones.

Secondly, producers of organic products tend to recognise that the people who choose certified organic products are likely also concerned with what's been put into their food. So, while 'certified organic' doesn't necessarily mean that additives won't be present, often less problematic options are used (they are required to be naturally derived, rather than synthetic), if they are included at all.

## HERE'S THE TRICK TO UNDERSTANDING ORGANIC CERTIFICATION:

**100% certified organic:** label can state "100% organic" and can have a certification logo (a couple of examples are below, however please note these aren't the only organic certifiers).



**95%-100% certified organic:** label can state "certified organic" and have the logo

**70%-95% certified organic:** label can state "made with certified organic ingredients", cannot use logo but must indicate certification number

**Less than 70% certified organic:** cannot make any certification claims, can only list ingredients as 'organic'. Cannot include certification number or logo



## WHAT TO AVOID

### CLAIMS ON THE FRONT LABEL

Consider the front label as a company's marketing strategy. You will often find claims of "healthy", "contains essential vitamins and minerals", "fat free", "sugar free", "100% natural", "made with real fruit" and so on. The truth is, this part of the packaging can be very misleading as it can distract you from the overall quality of the ingredients. While food companies can't outright lie, they can get creative. The ingredients list will always give you the real story on a product so start by flipping the packaging around and reading this.

### NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL

Many people get confused between the nutrition information panel and the ingredients list.

The nutrition information panel looks like this:

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings per package: 3		
Serving Size: 150g		
	Quantity per Serving	Quantity per 100g
Energy	608kJ	405kJ
Protein	4.2g	2.8g
Fat, total	7.4g	4.9g
– Saturated	4.5g	3.0g
Carbohydrate, total	18.6g	12.4g
– Sugars	18.6g	12.4g
Sodium	90mg	60mg
*Percentage of recommended dietary intake		



Here's the thing about nutritional panels. The ingredients list is where you want to focus most of your attention but this panel can sometimes be helpful when trying to decipher more information. For example, if you're looking at a product that contains sugar such as kombucha, looking at the sugar content in the nutrition information panel can help you ascertain how much sugar remains in the product (all kombucha will have sugar in the ingredients list as it is needed for the fermentation process, however a lot of this is used up by bacteria during fermentation). This can help you to identify a lower sugar option. When comparing options, be aware that what is considered a 'serving size' won't necessarily be the same across different brands, and it may not necessarily match what you'd consider a standard serving quantity either. If you're wanting to compare similar products, using the quantity per 100mL or per 100g column can help to ensure you're comparing like with like.

If you're looking at the sugars amount in the nutrition information panel on other products, also be aware that this doesn't differentiate between intrinsic sugars (sugar that occurs naturally in a food, such as fructose in fruit and lactose in dairy milk) and added sugars. This is another reason why it's a good idea to read the ingredients list so you know what the product is really made of.

## EXAMPLES OF INGREDIENTS TO BE MINDFUL OF AVOIDING WHERE POSSIBLE:

- artificial colours
- artificial flavours
- artificial sweeteners (these may be listed as the name of the specific sweetener used or as its corresponding number, commonly in the range of 950-962)
- synthetic preservatives (many numbers in the 200 range)
- synthetic emulsifiers (such as numbers 433 and 466)
- MSG (number 621), yeast extract, hydrolysed wheat/vegetable protein
- highly processed soy or soy derivatives (such as soy protein isolates)
- GMO ingredients
- vegetable oils (such as rapeseed, safflower, soybean, sunflower, canola, grapeseed and cottonseed)
- added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners

