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 signage 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fat (total)</td>
<td>95g</td>
<td>70g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which saturates</td>
<td>30g</td>
<td>20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>6g</td>
<td>6g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>120g</td>
<td>90g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GDAs 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 1,500 kcals or 1,800 kcals a day. This is the same for the other nutrients listed in the table.

Remember, GDAs 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 GDAs 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No more than (g/day)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-6 months</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12 months</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-14 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.