Know your labels
Your guide to reading food labels

People with diabetes are advised to follow the same healthy eating pattern recommended for everyone – food that is low in fat (especially saturated fat), salt and sugar, starchy carbohydrate foods in each meal and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Special diabetic foods are not recommended and offer no benefit to people with diabetes. Traffic light labelling and Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA), found on many packs, are useful guides to choosing a healthier diet.

Traffic light labelling found on the front of some packs can show you how healthy or unhealthy the product is for you and helps you to compare similar products. The traffic light colours tell you whether the product has low, medium or high amounts of fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. Examples are shown on the right.

- A **red** means **high** – the food is high in fat or salt or sugar (or a combination). It is fine occasionally but watch how often you have these foods or eat them in smaller quantities.
- An **amber** means **medium** – it’s okay to have some of the time but try to go for green when you have a choice.
- **Green** means **low** – a healthier choice.

Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) are for average adults of normal healthy weight as shown on the right. Individual needs will vary depending on age, weight, and activity levels. People trying to lose weight will probably need fewer calories and fat. Sometimes GDAs are labelled for ‘adults’. These figures are based on the GDAs for women to encourage people who need less energy to consume fewer calories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Each day</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy (calories)</strong></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fat</strong></td>
<td>70g</td>
<td>95g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>of which is saturated fat</strong></td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>30g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carbohydrate</strong></td>
<td>230g</td>
<td>300g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>of which total sugars</strong></td>
<td>90g</td>
<td>120g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salt</strong></td>
<td>Less than 6g</td>
<td>Less than 6g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>expressed as sodium</strong></td>
<td>Less than 2.4g</td>
<td>Less than 2.4g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fibre</strong></td>
<td>24g</td>
<td>24g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the label can help you decide whether the product contains ‘high’ or ‘low’ amounts of fat, sugar and salt.

- The table, directly to the right, guides you as to how much is in your food or drink per 100g. Your actual serving size affects how much sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt you will consume.
- If the quantity falls between the ‘high’ and ‘low’ figures, it is a medium amount.

- The figures for sugar don’t tell you how much of the sugar comes from natural sugars (eg **fruit sugar** known as **fructose** and **milk sugar** known as **lactose**) and how much comes from **added** sugars (eg **sucrose**).
- On the reverse, we explain some of the words you may find on food labels.
### Energy
- The amount of **calories** that a food or drink provides.
- To keep to your weight the energy from your food and drink must be in balance with the energy you use.
- If you take in more calories per day than your body needs you will gain weight.
- To lose weight you need to take in fewer calories per day than you use.

### Carbohydrate
- The figure for **total carbohydrate** includes the carbohydrate from starchy foods such as bread, potatoes and chapatis; fruit; some dairy products; sugar and other sweet foods. Some drinks also contain carbohydrate.
- About half of what you eat and drink should come from carbohydrate. For good health most of this should be from starchy carbohydrate, fruit and some dairy foods, with no more than one fifth from added sugar or table sugar.
- Carbohydrate (of which sugars) tells you how much sugar the food or drink contains and includes both added sugar and natural sugar (eg fruit sugar known as fructose and milk sugar known as lactose).
- All carbohydrate increases your blood glucose levels.
- To see if the product is high in added sugar, look at the ingredients list which always starts with the largest ingredient first.
- If counting carbohydrate, the amount you should count is the ‘total carbohydrate’ rather than the ‘of which sugars’.
- Intense (artificial) low-calorie sweeteners can be a useful alternative to sugar.

### Fat
- There are two main types of fat: **saturated** and **unsaturated** (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated) **fats**.
- Reduce your total fat intake particularly **saturated fat**, as it is linked to heart disease.
- Choose unsaturated fats or oils, (especially monounsaturated), as these types are better for your heart.
- Eating less fat helps you lose weight. Being a healthy weight helps your diabetes control.

### Salt
- Salt is the common name for **sodium chloride**. It’s the sodium in salt that can be bad for your health. Too much salt in your diet can cause high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke.
- You may see a value for **salt** or **sodium**.
- To convert **sodium** to **salt** multiply the figure by 2.5.
- To convert **salt** to **sodium** divide the figure by 2.5.

### fibre
- Known also as ‘roughage’– fibre is plant matter that your body can’t digest. There are two types, **soluble** and **insoluble**, both beneficial to your health.
- **Soluble fibre** helps to regulate your blood glucose and cholesterol levels. It is found in beans, pulses, oats, fruit and vegetables.
- **Insoluble fibre** helps to keep your digestive system healthy. It is found in wholegrain cereals and breads, fruit and vegetables.

### Further information
For individual dietary advice, ask your healthcare team to refer you to a registered dietitian.
For more information and support on diabetes call the Diabetes UK Careline on 0845 120 2960, Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm
www.diabetes.org.uk

These free booklets produced by Diabetes UK provide further dietary information:
- *Eating well with Type 1 diabetes* (code 9827)
- *Eating well with Type 2 diabetes* (code 9831)

**Diabetes UK orderline:** 0800 585 088

The charity for people with diabetes
**Telephone:** 020 7424 1000
**Website:** www.diabetes.org.uk

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