Heart and circulatory disease is the UK’s biggest killer but with a healthy lifestyle; you can reduce your risk. The British Heart Foundation is a national charity which plays a leading role in the fight against heart and circulatory disease through medical research, education and patient care.

For more information on keeping your heart healthy, call the British Heart Foundation’s Heart Health Line on 0870 600 6566.

Today, more than ever, we are aware of what we eat. We are swamped with information about the value of healthy eating. But many of us find it difficult to decide what products actually contain from the label.

All those figures can be very confusing and sometimes it’s hard to work out how much of everything we should be eating to have a healthier heart.

We hope this leaflet will help you to understand what food labels mean so that it is easier for you to choose foods which keep your heart healthy.
What to look for when you go shopping

If you have heart disease, watching what you eat is very important. When you look at a food label, you should look at:

1. the total amount of fat in foods
2. how much of the total fat is saturated fat
3. how much salt it contains

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

FAT
Eating too much fat has been linked with a greater risk of 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.

On food labels, check out whether the fat is saturated or unsaturated.

SALT (SODIUM)
On a food label, salt is often called sodium. A 6g portion of salt contains about 2.4g of sodium and it’s the sodium that can lead to health problems. Eating too much salt can cause high blood pressure, increasing your risk of heart disease.

SUGAR
There is no direct link between sugar and heart disease. But eating too many sugary foods doesn’t help if you are watching your weight.

How much is a lot or a little?
Try using the card below to work out how much is ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ fat, saturated fat, salt and other nutrients in food.

For foods you eat in large amounts, like ready meals, look at the ‘amount per serving’. For snacks, and other foods you eat in smaller amounts, look at the ‘per 100g’ information. Use the table below to work out whether there is a lot or a little of each nutrient in each food. Remember that the most important nutrient to look out for is fat.

Check claims such as ‘low in 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 recommended daily amount. Alternatively, use the rule of thumb given above to see whether there is a lot or a little fat.

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>95.0g</td>
<td>70.0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which saturates</td>
<td>30.0g</td>
<td>20.0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>7.0g</td>
<td>5.0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>70.0g</td>
<td>50.0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibre</td>
<td>20.0g</td>
<td>15.0g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You should use these figures only as a guide.

In general, men need about 2,500 kcal (calories) each day and women need about 2,000 kcal. However, what you need will be different from someone else. For example, someone who is very active will need more energy than someone who is not. This is the same for the other nutrients listed in the table.

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 mono-unsaturates 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.

FIBRE
Eating fibre adds bulk to your diet and fills you up with foods that are healthy for your heart. However, fibre probably does not have a direct effect on heart disease. 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.

To keep your heart healthy, you should watch how much fat you eat rather than count calories. If you cut down on the fat you eat then you will also cut down on the calories.

Guide to Food Labelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>A Little</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.0g of sugars</td>
<td>2.0g of sugars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.0g of fat</td>
<td>3.0g of fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0g of saturates</td>
<td>1.0g of saturates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0g of fibre</td>
<td>0.5g of fibre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5g of salt</td>
<td>0.3g of salt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>