

# Food Labels:

what you need to know to help you make better choices for your diabetes and for all your family

Amounts per 1/2 pack (as sold)

energy

780kJ

185kcal

9%

fat

3.5g

5%

saturates

0.4g

2%

sugars

<0.5g

<1%

salt

0.43g

7%

Approx. % Reference Intake

Typical values per 100g Energy 709kJ/168kcal

## What do you need to know when it comes to food labels?

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (sugar) in the blood. Glucose is our main energy source and comes from carbohydrates. Glucose is essential but diabetes related complications can occur if blood glucose levels remain too high over a long period of time.

Your glucose level can vary depending on:

- > the amount and type of carbohydrate in food and drinks
- > your prescribed diabetes medication
- > the amount and type of activity you take.

You should aim for a healthy balanced diet which includes starchy carbohydrates, is low in sugar and fat, high in fibre, fruit and vegetables.

## What's important when you have diabetes?

The first and most important thing is you need to understand it's NOT ALL about SUGAR!!!

Having diabetes means you need to be more aware of ALL carbohydrate sources as it's the amount of carbohydrate rather than the type that impacts on your blood glucose level more.



## What are carbohydrates?

There are 3 main **sources**:

1. **SUGARS**: We should limit the amount of free sugars in our diet, these are simple sugars added to foods by the manufacturer or consumer.

Free sugars include sugars that are found naturally in honey, syrups and fruit juices. These can be high in calories and lead to weight gain so limit to occasional treats. See the food pyramid for advice on servings of all foods \*



## 2. **NATURALLY OCCURRING SUGARS:** The

two main sources are lactose contained in dairy foods such as milk and yogurts and fructose found in fruit. Further information on dairy and fruit is covered in the food pyramid.\*



3. **STARCHES:** Think cereals, oats, potatoes, pasta, rice, noodles and breads.

Starches provide energy and are digested to give us glucose just the same as sugary foods. **Starches can be a better choice than sugary foods as they contain essential vitamins and fibre essential for health, but may need to be limited if you're overweight.**

It is the **amount** of carbohydrate that has more of an effect on blood glucose rather than the **type**.

So you should choose high fibre starches such as wholegrain breads, cereals, brown rice and pasta but be conscious of **portion size**.

**Higher fibre** foods release glucose more slowly and therefore keep us full for longer which can help with weight control. High fibre starches also help protect against heart disease, some cancers and helps prevent constipation.



\* Copies of the food pyramid are available on [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

# The Ingredients

All product ingredients are listed in order of their descending weight. This means that the product contains more of the ingredients first on the list; and less of those listed last.

## Sugar

Sugar can be described by many different names including sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltose, molasses and syrups.

The World Health Organisation recommends no more than 10-14 spoons (4g teaspoons) sugar daily.

Remember this is not just sugar you add to foods it's the sugar added to all processed foods and drinks you take. On a nutrition label - Look for Carbohydrate 'of which sugars'. To work out number of teaspoons – look at 'of which sugars' per serving and divide by 4.

According to the WHO: A teaspoon of sugar is approximately 4g, or one sugar cube.



## Example: Soft Drink 330ml

Nutrition Information Typical Values Per 100ml			
Energy:	180kj, 42kcal	Fat:	0g
Protein:	0g	of which saturates:	0g
Carbohydrate:	10.6g	Fibre:	0g
of Which Sugars:	10.6g	Sodium:	0g
Per 100mls			
Total carbohydrate 10.6g 'of which sugars 10.6g' ( $10.6 \times 3.3 = 35$ ) 35 divided by 4 = in this 330ml drink there are 9 spoons of sugar.			

# Reading and understanding what a label is telling me

Food labels can give details such as:

- the weight of the item
- the ingredients
- traffic light labelling and GDA (Guideline Daily Amount)
- nutritional information.

## Understanding traffic light labelling

This can be found on the front of some foods and the colours, similar to traffic lights can be an easier way of reading a label for comparing different products.

Foods	Sugars	Fat	Saturates	Salt
<b>HIGH</b> per 100g	Over 22.5g	Over 17.5g	Over 5g	Over 1.5g
<b>MEDIUM</b> per 100g	Between 5g and 22.5g	Between 3g and 17.5g	Between 1.5g and 5g	Between 0.3g and 1.5g
<b>LOW</b> per 100g	5g and below	3g and below	1.5g and below	0.3g and below

Advice for drinks (per 100ml)

	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
<b>Sugars</b>	2.5g and below	Between 2.5g and 11.25g	Over 11.25g

In short, the more green lights, the healthier the

With diabetes you need to be aware of the total carbohydrates (sugars and starches) in the foods that you choose. The traffic light label at the front only looks at the sugar so you need to also look at the total carbohydrate which is on the nutritional label at the back of the pack.

choice. Everybody should try to choose foods which are lower in sugars, fats and salt.

Using the example of a pack of digestive biscuits:  
On the front of the pack you may find the nutritional value for 1 biscuit.

Each biscuit contains

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
78kcal	3.6g	1.8g	2.7g	0.12
4%	5%	9%	3%	2%

of an adult's reference intake  
(Colours indicate per 100g serving)

The nutritional information for the product, normally found on the side or back panel of the product is given as per 100g/ml and/or per serving.

Typical values	Per 100g	Per biscuit
Energy	2071kJ/490kcal	327kJ/78kcal
Protein	6.6g	1g
Carbohydrate	64.5g	10.2g
of which sugars	17g	2.7g
Fat	22.7g	3.6g
of which saturates	11.7g	1.8g
Fibre	2.8g	0.4g
Sodium	0.3g	0.05g
Salt equivalent	0.74g	0.12g

So are these biscuits OK for me?

Well the answer depends on how many and how often you have them. Looking at the above images, 2 digestive biscuits have 5.4g (2.7g x2) of sugar, nearly 1½ spoons, but in total have 20.4g (10.2g x2) of carbohydrate so will raise glucose levels more than a yogurt or a piece of fruit as these can have roughly 15g of carbohydrate each.

So a low sugar (diet) yogurt or a piece of fruit would be a better regular choice of snack rather than biscuits which have added sugars, fat and salt so should be limited to occasionally especially if you are trying to lose weight.

## Guideline Daily Amount (GDAs)

On most packs you will also find guidelines that help put nutrition information into the context of an overall diet. Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA) are listed in the blue table, these are intended to help you work out how much of the different nutrients are supplied in the food.

### Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA)

TYPICAL VALUES	WOMEN	MEN	Children (5-10 years)
Calories	2,000 kcal	2,500 kcal	1,800 kcal
Protein	45 g	55 g	24 g
Carbohydrate	230 g	300g	220 g
Sugars	90 g	120 g	85 g
Fat	70 g	95 g	70 g
Saturates	20 g	30 g	20 g
Fibre	24 g	24 g	15 g
Salt	6 g	6 g	4 g

## What about sweeteners?

All sweeteners licensed for use in Ireland are safe. These give a sweet taste to foods and have little or no effect on glucose levels. These are usually used in foods such as diet drinks and yogurts. But be careful with the number of processed foods you eat/drink.

## Important things to remember!

Be aware that some products labelled 'Low in Fat' can be **higher in sugar** than the original version so are not always better.

Ingredients are listed with the largest ingredient first so if you want to know if a product has a lot of one particular ingredient it will be in the first 4 listed.

If you or your child are carb counting use the carbohydrate value from the full nutritional label (this includes starches and sugars) and not 'sugars' from the traffic light label on the front.

Try to plan meals and snacks around more fresh foods and avoid processed foods where possible.





For more information on sweeteners and 'diabetic products', diabetes, food and suitable recipes for families living with diabetes and being sugar smart see [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie) or [www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie)

Other useful websites and sources of information

On Labelling [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)

On Nutrition [www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie)

WE FIGHT FOR BETTER SERVICES FOR YOU  
WE WANT WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU  
WE EXIST TO SUPPORT YOU



Discover the difference by joining Diabetes Ireland today Log onto [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie)  
Call the DIABETES HELPLINE: (01) 842 8118

HEAD OFFICE

19 Northwood House, Northwood Business Campus,  
Santry, Dublin 9, D09 DH30  
Ph: 01 842 8118  
[info@diabetes.ie](mailto:info@diabetes.ie)

SOUTHERN OFFICE

Unit 3, Enterprise House  
36 Mary Street, Cork, T12 H6NH  
Ph: 021 427 4229  
[corkcarecentre@diabetes.ie](mailto:corkcarecentre@diabetes.ie)

WESTERN OFFICE

1 Wine Street,  
Sligo Town, F91 RFK1  
Ph: 071 914 6001  
[wro@diabetes.ie](mailto:wro@diabetes.ie)

Registered CHY number: 6906 Diabetes Federation of Ireland (trading as 'Diabetes Ireland')  
This leaflet was kindly supported by a HSE lottery grant.