



Media release

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Food labels and NUT-rition - reading between the lines

Many consumers have difficulty understanding and using the information on food labels to guide their food choices.¹

A review of the laws and policies relating to food labels is currently underway in Australia. One specific aspects of food labelling being considered is the mandatory introduction of a Front of Pack Labelling (FOPL) system (providing nutrition information on the front of the pack intended to guide consumer food choices). One FOPL system being considered is the UK adopted Traffic Light System which applies red, amber or green traffic lights to the front of the pack depending on the total fat, sugar and salt content of the product.²

Implementing this Traffic Light System is not as simple as start, slow, stop. And don't be fooled by the Percentage Daily Intake "Thumb Nails": currently on food packs either. Only tallying 'total fats' in foods and ignoring the TYPE of fat means that natural primary produce foods containing healthy fats such as nuts, avocados and olives would carry the same 'red light' as manufactured chocolate bars and chips.

Consumers need to interpret food labels correctly in the context of their individual lifestyle and dietary and health needs. While no more than a third of your energy needs should come from fat, there is a distinct difference between the health impact of saturated fats (bad) and unsaturated fats (good). Saturated fats are mainly found in foods from animal origin e.g. fatty meats and full fat dairy (and one plant based exception coconut and palm oil used in manufactured cakes, biscuits, crackers etc). Excess saturated fats cause high blood cholesterol which is linked with an increased risk of heart disease³. Unsaturated fats (*monounsaturated* and *polyunsaturated* fats) however, have the opposite effect.

A growing body of research has shown that the *unsaturated* fat content in nuts is highly beneficial to maintaining a healthy heart. Eating a handful of nuts (30g) each day can halve the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD).⁴ This is due to the combination of a number of heart healthy nutrients (healthy fats, fibre, arginine, plant sterols, vitamins E and antioxidant minerals: copper, manganese, selenium and zinc) which help control blood cholesterol, reduce inflammation and have an antioxidant effect.⁴

So what do you need to know when it comes to reading the nutrition facts and figures on food packaging? Choosing foods wisely is made easier with Nuts for Life's Top Five Tips for demystifying food labels.

Tip 1: Common Sense - Before you even read the label, ask yourself does the food fit into a healthy diet? Is it a dietary staple or a once a week/month treat? Where would it sit in the Healthy Eating Pyramid?

Tip2: Beyond Kilojoule Counting – If you focus on kilojoule content alone you may miss out on many nutritious foods. While nuts contain significant kilojoules per 100g they contain a combination of more than 28 different essential nutrients from arginine to zinc. Avoid kilojoules from heavily processed foods, making natural foods your preference. Despite nuts high healthy fat content, nuts can be eaten in a successful weight management diet.⁵

Tip 3: Not all Fats are Equal – check the Nutrition Information Panel for the saturated and trans fat (bad) and the unsaturated and omega-3 fats (good). Nuts are an excellent source of *polyunsaturated* and *monounsaturated* fats; the good fats which help manage cholesterol. If total fat is greater than 10g per 100g, make sure the majority of fat is the healthy kind.

Tip4: Serve Size - Using the nutrient information per 100g in the Nutrition Information Panel is useful when comparing similar products. But don't forget to consider the quantity of the food in the stated serve as described on pack e.g. a handful of nuts is 30-50g. Do you normally eat more or less than this? Aim for a handful of nuts every day.

Tip 5: Knowing High & Low - Putting numbers into context. Is this food providing high or low amounts of certain important nutrients? Look at the Nutrition Information Panel (NIP).

These values per 100g in a NIP may appear high but.....

- 30g of sugars (*check the ingredients list could be from natural sources e.g. dried fruits, honey*)
- 20g of fat (*refer to Tip 3 Not all Fats are Equal, could be all healthy fats*)
- 3g of fibre (*good for digestive health*)
- 600mg of sodium (*look for sodium content of less than 120mg per 100g to help maintain a healthy blood pressure*)

These values per 100g may appear small but.....

- 2g of sugars (*artificially sweetened foods are not always healthy foods*)
- 3g of fat (*low fat/ no fat foods are a thing of the past, look for healthy fats*)
- 0.5g of fibre (*low fibre foods may contribute to constipation and other bowel conditions*)
- 20mg sodium (*look for the lowest in sodium, we only need 920mg sodium per day*)

For the nutrient composition of nuts, go to <http://bit.ly/be9v1d> on the Nuts for Life website www.nutsforlife.com.au

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Nuts for Life is a nutrition communications initiative of the Australian Tree Nut Industry and Horticulture Australia to provide information about the nutrition and health benefits of tree nuts.

For all the latest information, facts and research on the nutrition and health benefits of nuts, and for tips and recipes to include more nuts in your day, visit www.nutsforlife.com.au and subscribe to our online newsletter *NutENews*.

To keep up with daily news, research and recipes featuring nuts, click below to follow us on Twitter [@nutsforlife](https://twitter.com/nutsforlife).



References

1) Food Standards Australia New Zealand FRSC Working Group, Consultation Paper for a Front of Pack Labelling Policy Guide, February 2009

2) Choice, Traffic Light Labelling <http://www.choice.com.au/Consumer-Action/Your-food-labels.aspx> accessed 10 June 2010

3) Dietitians Association of Australia, Saturated Fats <http://www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?PageID=2145873353> accessed 17 June 2010

4) Nuts for Life Literature review summary - Eat Nuts Protect Your Heart, <http://www.nutsforlife.com.au> accessed 22 March 2010

5) Nuts for Life – Literature review summary Eat Nuts Manage Your Weight, <http://www.nutsforlife.com.au> accessed 22 March 2010