

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK)

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK) is the principal UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer through the promotion of healthy diet and nutrition, physical activity and weight management. WCRF UK is committed to providing cancer research and education programmes which expand our understanding of the importance of our food and lifestyle choices in the cancer process.

By spreading the good news that cancer can be prevented, WCRF UK hopes that many thousands of lives will be saved. The education and research programmes of WCRF UK are funded almost entirely by donations from the public.

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK)
19 Harley Street, London W1G 9QJ
Tel: 020 7343 4200 Fax: 020 7343 4201
Web: www.wcrf-uk.org Email: wcrf@wcrf.org

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Registered Office: 19 Harley Street, London W1G 9QJ

“Stopping cancer before it starts”

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Fibre

Choosing a diet high in fibre can help keep your digestive system healthy and regular. It probably decreases your risk of bowel cancer and can also help keep your heart healthy. Foods high in fibre contain around 6g or more per 100g. There are two types of fibre: soluble and insoluble, both of which are good for you.

Soluble fibre can help reduce blood cholesterol levels and control blood glucose levels, providing a steadier release of energy. Good sources of soluble fibre include fruit and vegetables, pulses and oats.

Insoluble fibre is mainly found in wholegrain breads and cereals (like pasta and rice). It can help prevent constipation, keeping your digestive system healthy.

Most people in the UK don't eat enough fibre, so try to include more in your diet. Different types of fibre are found in different foods, so it is important to eat a wide variety of fibre-rich foods.



Salt (Sodium)

Salt is listed in grams (g). Too much salt increases your risk of stomach cancer as well as high blood pressure – a risk factor for heart disease. It is the sodium component of salt that can be harmful to your health. Food labels sometimes list the sodium content instead of salt. To work out how much salt food contains, multiply the sodium content by 2.5:

$$0.4\text{g of sodium} \times 2.5 = 1\text{g of salt}$$

In total, you should aim to eat less than 6g of salt (2.4g of sodium) a day.

Most of the salt in our diet (about three quarters) comes from processed foods such as ready meals, soups, bread, processed meat, salty snacks and some breakfast cereals. We are not always aware that these foods are high in salt because they may not taste 'salty', so it's important to check the food label. The rest of the salt in our diet is either added during cooking or at the table. Only a very small amount is found naturally in foods.



Additional label information

Ingredients

Ingredients, including additives and water, are listed in descending order of weight.

Use by date

Used on highly perishable foods. Foods are unsafe to eat after this date.

Best before date

Used on foods that can be kept for longer periods. Foods may still be safe to eat after this date, but may be past their best.

Cooking/defrosting instructions

Following these instructions is important as they help make sure that food is safe to eat.

Storage

Following storage instructions will help prevent bacterial contamination and food poisoning.

For best results and to prevent food poisoning, always follow the manufacturer's instructions for safe storage and cooking/serving.

SALT	SATURATES	FAT	SUGARS	Is it healthy?	
				Use these traffic light guidelines when checking food labels to help you make a healthier choice.	FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY GUIDELINES
over 1.5g	over 5g	over 20g	over 15g	HIGH per 100g of food (eat small amounts, or just occasionally)	Use these traffic light guidelines when checking food labels to help you make a healthier choice.
between 0.3g and 1.5g	between 1.5g and 5g	between 3g and 20g	between 5g and 15g	MEDIUM per 100g of food (OK most of the time)	
0.3g and below	1.5g and below	3g and below	5g and below	LOW per 100g of food (a healthier choice)	

Understanding Food Labels



World Cancer Research Fund



What does a food label tell me?

Food labels normally list energy, protein, carbohydrate and fat. Some also include information on sugars, specific types of fat, fibre, salt and other vitamins and minerals.

Amounts are given per 100g or 100ml and manufacturers may provide information per serving as well. Amounts per 100g/100ml are useful for making comparisons between products. Bear in mind that you may eat or drink more or less than the serving sizes suggested on the label.

Several supermarkets and food manufacturers are now using traffic light food labels – they make it easier to see at a glance if a food is high in fat, sugar or salt. Traffic light labels can help you choose healthier options, which is important for good health and a reduced risk of cancer.



Energy

Energy is the first value on a food label. It is expressed in kilojoules (kJ) and kilocalories (kcal). We normally refer to kcals as 'calories'.

As a guide, an average-sized woman who is a healthy weight for her height needs around 2,000 calories a day, while an average-sized man who is a healthy weight needs around 2,500 calories. However, calorie requirements vary according to age, body size and lifestyle factors – e.g., how active we are. To maintain a healthy weight, we need to balance the amount of energy we take in with the amount we use up each day.

Some foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat) are energy dense, which means they contain more calories, weight-for-weight, than other foods. As a guide, energy-dense foods contain more than about 225-275 kcal per 100g – consuming too many of these foods can lead to weight gain. Sugary drinks can also be high in calories so we should try to avoid them too.



Protein

Protein is the second value on a food label and it is expressed in grams (g). Our bodies need protein for metabolism, growth and repair, and it can also be a source of energy.

Sources of protein include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, pulses, nuts and cereals.

Some fatty cuts of red meat can be high in saturated fat, so it's best to choose lean cuts and eat it in moderation. Red meat (like beef, lamb and pork) and processed meat (like bacon, ham and salami) are linked to a higher risk of bowel cancer. Try to eat less than 500g (cooked weight) of red meat (700-750g raw weight) per week, and avoid processed meat almost always. Opt for fish, lean poultry or vegetarian sources of protein instead.

As a rough guide, think of a 'portion' of meat as being about the size of a pack of cards.



Carbohydrate

Carbohydrate is shown in grams (g). There are two main types: starchy (or complex) carbohydrates, and sugars. You should aim to base your meals around relatively unprocessed complex carbohydrates. The amount of carbohydrate listed on a food label is often the sum of both starchy carbohydrates and sugars. However, some labels also indicate what proportion of the carbohydrate is made up of starches or sugars.

Healthy sources include wholemeal breads, wholegrain cereals and pasta, as well as potatoes, pulses and some vegetables. Most complex carbohydrates give a slow, steady release of energy and can also be a good source of fibre, helping you to feel full for longer.

You should try to limit your intake of sugars, particularly the refined sugars commonly found in processed foods like confectionery, biscuits and sugary drinks. This is important for good health, and can also help prevent tooth decay.



Fat

Did you know that fat contains twice as many calories, gram for gram, as carbohydrate and protein? Although a small amount is essential for good health, we should try to limit the amount we consume. High amounts of fat increase the risk of obesity, and saturated and trans fats increase risk of heart disease. When possible, opt for foods that contain unsaturated fat, rather than saturated or trans fats.

On average, women should aim for no more than 70g of fat a day, of which 20g can be saturates; men should aim for no more than 95g of fat a day, of which 30g can be saturates.

Main types of fat

Saturated fat – higher in meats, dairy products and many processed foods

Trans fat (hydrogenated fat) – found in some hard margarines and some processed foods such as biscuits, cakes and ready meals such as pies

Unsaturated fat, which can be:

- *monounsaturated* – good sources are olive and rapeseed oil, avocado and nuts
- *polyunsaturated* – good sources are sunflower and soya oil, oily fish, nuts and seeds

You will find a handy card on the reverse of this leaflet – it shows the traffic light guidelines for fat, sugars and salt. Peel it off and keep it with you to work out if foods are green, amber or red (even if they don't display traffic light labels).

What do the traffic light colours mean?

- **red (high)** = eat small amounts, or just occasionally
- **amber (medium)** = OK most of the time
- **green (low)** = a healthier choice

