

Reading Nutritional Labels

One of the most daunting things you have to do in a supermarket when you do not know how to do it... reading nutritional labels. Never fear, I am here to make it a little easier for you. First things first, IGNORE stupid ticks, health star ratings, 99% fat free labels or any other marketing ploy on the front of the packaging. It is just marketing, not all of the time, but a lot of the time, it is a load of crap. Take nutrigrain for example. It gets a 4 star health rating... Who knows why, it is a bowl of sugar. Even though I would always recommend consuming fresh produce over pre packaged items, sometimes pre packaged has to be done, and that it is fine. For example; I would always opt to make my own pasta sauce, but I keep a jar in the pantry as back up, for when I don't have a lot of time, or when its coming to the end of the week fresh produce is becoming less fresh. Say I have some frozen mince in the freezer. Jar of pasta sauce, plus any left over veggies chopped up... spaghetti bolognese. If you have kids, you may not have time to make your own school snacks, so muesli bars become a go to. Don't even get me started on the array of yogurts you can choose from these days. So being able to understand labels is a good way to make informed decisions on things like yogurts, cereals, muesli bars, pasta sauces and many other things that can be found in packages.

Ingredients – the ingredients in a product will always be listed in order of greatest to least quantity. If a product ever starts with sugar, or anything ending in “ose” big no no. Generally, the longer the list, the worse it is for you. For example; natural peanut butter - 1-2 ingredient, peanuts and sometimes a little sea salt. Others like Kraft Peanut Butter have Peanuts, sugar, soybean oil (antioxidant 330), maltodextrin (from corn), emulsifier (471), salt, molasses. Case and point.

When comparing products, always look at the 100g column as serving sizes can vary between products.

Sugars – when looking at the 100g column, you want to opt for a product less than 12-15g of sugar. If it contains fruit, such as in muesli, it may have a slightly higher sugar content because of the natural sugars found in the fruit but try to get one that is as close to 15g as possible. Obviously the lower the sugar the content, the better.

Fat – when it comes to the fat reading, you want to reach for products with less than 10g per 100g total fat. Products with healthy fats such as nuts, avocado, seeds, etc may contain more but if majority of the fat is falling under saturated fat, less than 10g is best. Products should never have more than 5g per 100g of saturated fats..

Sodium – the big one in society today, it will be very hard to find products with the recommended sodium intake. For products to be low in salt, they must have less than 120mg of sodium per 100g. But in general, try to buy products lower than 300mg.

Serving sizes – always look at the servings per package and determine what serving you will be having. If a package says 3 servings and you eat it in 1, probably went a little bit over board. So keep the recommended serving sizes in mind as well. A good example of this are the healthy snacks aisle. Choc coated rice cakes, come in a little 60g hand sized packet, could easily look at it and think that is 1 serving, when actually there are 4 servings in that one little packet... Always check serving sizes.