



LABEL READING AND FOOD ALLERGIES



Food labelling in Australia is governed by FSANZ (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand).



There are two places where nutrition information can be obtained from a food label:

1. NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL

Indicates how much energy (kilojoules), protein, fats, carbohydrates and other nutrients are in a product. The nutrition information panel is not useful in determining information regarding food allergens.



Example: Uncle Tobys Muesli Bar

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
SERVINGS PER PACKAGE – 8		
SERVING SIZE – 33g (1BAR)		
	PER SERVING	PER 100g
Energy	550kJ	1680Kj
Protein	2.4g	7.2g
Fat		
- Total	3.6g	11.0g
- Saturated	1.3g	4.1g
Carbohydrate		
- Total	21.5g	55.1g
- Sugars	10.1g	30.7g
Dietary Fibre	1.7g	5.1g
Sodium	20mg	70mg



2. INGREDIENTS LIST

- An ingredients list must be included on all products.
- Ingredients are listed from greatest to smallest by weight..
- Where there are very small amounts of multi-component ingredients (<5%) the compound ingredient only may be listed eg chocolate (rather than cocoa, cocoa butter and sugar).
- Ingredients that can cause an allergic reaction (peanuts and other nuts, seafood, fish, milk, eggs, soybeans, wheat and other gluten containing grains) must be declared, however small the amount.

Examples: Instead of simply “albumin”

1. Albumin (egg)
 2. Egg albumin
 3. “Contains egg products” at beginning or end of ingredients list.
- This includes ingredients that may be classed as processing aids such as flour coating moulds.
 - A second or additional way that food allergens can be labelled is through the use of a statement directly after the ingredient list eg Contains milk and egg products

Example: Uncle Toby’s Muesli Bar

INGREDIENTS: Cereals (Uncle Toby’s oats, **wheat**, barley, **wheatgerm**), glucose (**wheat**), puffed rice (rice flour, sugar, rice bran, salt, emulsifier (471), colour (150d)), sugar, vegetable oil (antioxidants (319,329)), dried apricot (6%), (rice flour, preservative (**sulphites**)), honey, humectants (420, 422), coconut, treacle, emulsifier (**soy** lecithin), food acid (330), salt, flavour
Contains wheat, soy and sulphites

Only **proteins** need to be avoided for food allergy and some food additives may be derived from potential allergens but are unlikely to contain food protein as it is removed during processing. These products will still be labelled as containing milk, egg, wheat, nut, soy etc.

Examples:

Egg – Egg lecithin, egg emulsifier

Soy- Soy emulsifier, soy lecithin

Wheat - glucose, glucose syrup, dextrose, caramel colour and monosodium glutamate

“MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF” STATEMENTS

These statements are used by manufacturers to indicate that the product may be contaminated with potential food allergen ingredients through processing and packaging. At present these statements are voluntary and there are no clear guidelines for companies regarding how and when to use them. The wording of the statements makes it very difficult to determine the level of risk and a product that does not contain the statement may be no safer than a product that does. The chance of having a significant allergic reaction through contamination during processing is extremely unlikely. Most families, whose child does not have severe reactions, choose to ignore these statements as the only safe alternative is to avoid commercial food products in your child's diet. For children with severe allergic reactions companies can be contacted directly to explore food processing, packaging and cleaning procedures.

FOOD ADDITIVES

Food additives are used in products for many different reasons such as ensuring food quality and safety. All food additives used in Australian products, such as colours, preservatives, emulsifiers are identified by standard code numbers. Food additives must be identified, usually by a number, and included in the ingredients list. Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) provide strict guidelines for the use of, and labelling of additives. If an additive is based on a potential allergen (peanuts and other nuts, seafood, fish, milk, eggs, soybeans, wheat and other gluten containing grains) this must be indicated. Example- emulsifier (322-egg) or egg emulsifier (322).

FOODS MANUFACTURED AND PACKAGED OVERSEAS

Australia has strict guidelines for the packaging and labelling of foods but some countries do not. Foods manufactured and packaged overseas are strictly monitored. There must be an ingredients list, it must be in English and all potential allergens must be identified.

This system is not fool proof. Initial shipments are inspected every time until compliance is ensured and then 1 in 4 shipments is checked and if there are ongoing shipments coming into Australia only 1 in 20 shipments is checked. Incorrect labelling is one of the most common reasons for product importation failure.

The use of stickers with the ingredients list and Australian specific labelling requirements is permitted.

Be aware that other words may be used for potential allergen ingredients in other countries eg. Peanuts can be referred to as monkey nuts or ground nuts

FOOD LABELLING SUMMARY

1. Check the ingredients list every time you purchase a product as ingredients can change.
2. Check the ingredients list for potential allergens. Remember with the new labelling laws – “no news, is good news”, that is if the label does not specify that the allergen is present it is not a direct ingredient.
3. May contain traces of statements are voluntary statements and are used to indicate the product may be contaminated with a potential allergen through processing or manufacturing, The chances of having a severe allergic reaction through contamination are extremely unlikely. These products should only be excluded for people with severe allergies.
4. Be wary of products from overseas.