



TRICKY INGREDIENTS

Summary

The ingredient lists printed on packets show all the substances used to make a food. They can include everything from sugar and flour, to water, caffeine, spices, flavourings or numbered additives. Some names are very complicated.

The list starts with the ingredient that there is most of in the food and ends with the one there is least of. The first three ingredients make up most of the food, so watch for what they are. Key ingredients – like the apricots in apricot jam – have a percentage (%) value after so we can tell what fraction of the food they make up.

Additives are substances that are added in tiny amounts to change how a food looks, tastes, feels, or keeps. Examples include pectin and vitamin C. Compound ingredients, like “hokey pokey chips”, are themselves made up of several ingredients: you’ll usually see these sub-ingredients listed inside brackets [] after the compound name.

What’s in the ingredient list on food packets?

Everything used to prepare and make a food is shown in order from highest to lowest by weight when it was added. This includes water – although not any that is lost as steam. The first three ingredients usually make up most of the food. At the end you’ll usually find things like spices, flavourings, minerals, vitamins and additives – unless they are listed earlier as part of a **compound ingredient**. Any ingredient that might cause an allergic reaction must be listed, however tiny the amount that is there in the food.



Why do some ingredients have percentages after them?

The ingredient list must show how much (by percentage weight) of any key (“**characterising**”) ingredient is in a food. These are the ingredients we can expect to be in the food or that are mentioned in its name: like “strawberry” jam. They allow us to compare the amount present between similar products – like the percentages of fruit in different brands of strawberry jam (it ranges from 43% to 63%). They also tell us how much of a key ingredient – like fish – there actually is in a product like fish fingers (it’s about 50% to 55%).



What is a compound ingredient?

A compound ingredient is something that's already made up of two or more ingredients when it is used to make a food. Examples include compound choc, hokey pokey chips in ice cream, tomato sauce (in baked beans) and even butter. The ingredient list must list all the compound's sub-ingredients – usually after its name in square brackets – unless it makes up less than 5% of the food and as long as nothing in it can cause allergies. On a can of baked beans, you might see a compound ingredient listed as follows: Tomato sauce [tomatoes, sugar, salt, wheat flour, maize thickener (1412), stabilisers (412,466), spices, flavours, and food acid (citric acid)].



What are additives?

Additives are substances that improve the taste, appearance, structure, or keeping quality of a food. There are about 19 different types of them grouped into classes like colourings, flavour enhancers, sweeteners, emulsifiers, stabilisers, anti-caking agents, preservatives, and humectants (which keep foods moist). Some belong to more than one class. In ingredient lists they appear under the class name for what they mainly do in that food, followed by their specific name or number in brackets. Additives can be natural or artificial.

Names or numbers?

Every additive has a unique name and number in the Food Standards Code. Manufacturers can choose whether to use numbers or names, so just because something has a number, doesn't mean it's artificial. Pectin (a natural thickening or gelling substance) is number 440: it can show up as Thickener (pectin) or Gelling agent (440); carotene (from coloured vegetables) can be Colour (carotene) or Colour (160a); Vitamin C (ascorbic acid or 300) is natural, but Thickener (1442) is artificial – it's called hydroxypropyl distarch phosphate.

When does caffeine have to be listed as an ingredient in drinks?

When caffeine is added to a food/drink or in it at over a certain level it's listed. It isn't listed on coffee, tea, cocoa or kola labels because it's considered to be there naturally. It's listed when added to cola drinks, energy drinks and bars. But because guarana extract naturally contains high levels of caffeine, drinks using it as an ingredient must show they contain caffeine.



What do some ingredient list names mean?

If you're unsure of what all the ingredient names mean keep an eye on the Nutrition Information Panel (NIP) values, because whatever something is called, if it contains sodium, or if it's a sugar, carbohydrate or fat it gets added to the group total for this on the NIP.

Some ingredient names that contain sugar include: brown, demerara, muscovado, loaf, powdered, raw, or cane sugars; sucrose, fructose (fruit sugar), glucose, dextrose (another name for glucose), invert sugar (a mix of glucose and fructose); corn syrup, golden syrup; "natural" sounding sweeteners like maple, agave, rice, and bran syrups; fruit nectar, puree or juice concentrate; date or coconut sugar; honey, treacle, molasses, and dried fruits.

Sugar alcohols can be used as **sweeteners** instead of sugars in foods like sweets and drinks. They have fewer calories than sugars and are counted as carbohydrates rather than sugars on the NIP. They include glycerine, glycerol, isomalt, mannitol, sorbitol, xylitol, erythritol, lactitol and maltitol. Some (like sorbitol) may also be used as humectants.

Ingredient names containing fat include: vegetable oil, named vegetable oils (like canola, sunflower, palm oil), palm olein, vegetable shortening, coconut cream/butter, coconut oil, ghee; plus all the animal fats and dairy-based butters, liquids and powders you'd expect.

Sodium is in: rock salt, kosher salt, pink salt, Himalayan salt, sea salt, sodium chloride; and additives like monosodium glutamate (MSG; 621), sodium bicarbonate (baking soda; 500), or the preservatives sodium nitrite (250), and sodium benzoate (211).



USEFUL LINKS

Ingredients with George Zaidan, 24 November 2016. "What Makes Sugar-free Gum Sweet?" or "What's in Peanut Butter?" Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNHfxbTAJd8&index=11&list=PLivjPDIt6ApStHBU9Z_5vB7dM_tT_QjyX or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgvyBN2IzZ4&index=7&list=PLivjPDIt6ApStHBU9Z_5vB7dM_tT_QjyX1 2 August 2017.

ANZ Food Standards Code, 13 April 2017. "Schedule 8 - Food Additive Names and Code Numbers". Retrieved from: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2017C00339> 2 August 2017..
Life education factsheets., Sweet Talking, Sugary Sweet Alternatives, Sodium, Food Allergies and Intolerances, and Nutrition Information Panels.



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