



HOW TO DIGEST NUTRITION AND HEALTH CLAIMS



Summary

Packaged foods often say (“claim”) they contain certain nutrients or will help our health. Their makers can choose whether to put this information on their products.

Nutrition content claims are about whether a nutrient is there, or how much of it is there. They say things like *Good source of fibre, Low sugar, Reduced fat or Diet*.

Health claims say that a substance that is in the food is going to improve your health or prevent bad health. They say things like *Calcium for healthy bones and teeth*.

To make a nutrition claim about a food, its maker must prove to national authorities that it contains the nutrient/s they say, at a level the authorities have set. For a health claim they must prove that it contains the substance and that it has the effects they say it does.

What’s the difference between a nutrition and health claim?

Nutrition content claims are ones made about the content of certain nutrients or substances in a food. Look at some packaging, perhaps on a breakfast cereal, yoghurt, or muesli bar. Chances are, you’ll see nutrition content claims like: *Low Sodium, Reduced fat, Excellent source of fibre, Gluten-free, Source of protein or No added sugars*.

Health claims make a statement about the relationship between a substance in a food and a positive health effect or reduced risk of poor health. They might be phrases like: *Calcium for healthy bones and teeth, Omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, Folate helps to fight fatigue, Fibre to help keep your digestive system moving, Carbohydrates for energy, or Phytosterols may reduce blood cholesterol*.

All health and nutrition claims are voluntary - unlike the standard information on how much energy, protein, fat, saturated fat, sugar, total carbohydrate, and sodium a food contains that must be provided on the nutrition information panel (NIP) for most packaged foods.

What can be claimed?

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (FSC) determines what can be claimed.

To make a nutrition content claim, like *Contains fibre* a product must usually prove that it contains a certain amount of that substance (unless the claim is about something not being there, like *Gluten-free*). The manufacturer (maker of the product) then has to prove that it meets the FSC claim conditions - like containing enough fibre per serve to count as a *Good source of fibre* or less than a certain level of fat to count as *Low fat*. If it is not one of the seven substances covered by the standard NIP, it must also include information about the substance, like how much of it is in an average serve and per 100 g.



Health claims can only be put on foods that meet a set of special health scoring criteria: you can't put them on foods that are high in saturated fats, sugar, or salt, or drinks containing over 1.15% alcohol. The claim must be true and backed up by scientific evidence and research. Unlike nutrition content claims, the exact wording is left up to manufacturers.

No artificial colourings, flavours or preservatives ...

This isn't a nutrition or health claim, although it is often interpreted and presented as one. Both natural and synthetic (man-made) additives are widely used in processed foods and all have to meet strict safety conditions. There is nothing intrinsically safer about one or the other.

And remember ...

Different countries have different regulations – so imported goods may not meet all the NZ criteria. And just because something claims it has good levels of one substance, doesn't mean it is healthy overall – we need to balance the overall picture when choosing.



USEFUL LINKS

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What are the levels for some common nutrition content claims?

Fibre	A food must contain at least 2 g/serve to be able to say it contains fibre. It needs 4 g/serve to call itself a Good source . It needs 7 g/serve to be an Excellent source .
Fat	Low means it contains no more fat than 1.5 g/100 mL (liquids) or 3 g/100 g (solids). X% Fat Free foods must meet the conditions for a Low Fat claim. Something that contains 3 g total fat per 100 g is $(100 - 3) = 97\%$ fat free.
Carbohydrates and Energy	Increased carbohydrate foods must contain at least 25% more carbohydrate than the same amount of a regular version of the food. Low energy foods must have an average energy content of no more than 80 kJ/100 mL (liquids) or 170 kJ/100 g (solids). Diet products must pass health scoring criteria and either meet Low energy values or contain at least 40% less energy than the same amount of the regular version.
Protein	A food needs 10 g/serve to call itself a Good source .
Sugars*	Low sugar means no more sugars than 2.5 g/100 mL (liquids) or 5 g/100 g (solids). X% Sugar Free foods must meet the low sugar conditions. Something with 5 g sugars per 100 g is 95% sugar free. These foods often use artificial sweeteners or sugar alcohols instead. No added sugar means no extra sugars have been added to a food during processing, and also no glucose syrup, or substances like maltodextrin, honey, fruit sugar syrups (maple, agave etc.), or concentrated fruit juices. But if the claim is about a soft, sports or energy drink added concentrated or reconstituted fruit juices don't count as "added sugar"! "No added" products can still add ingredients like dried fruits that are rich in natural sugars, malt and its extracts, non-sugar low/zero calorie substances like sugar alcohols and intense or artificial sweeteners (like stevia or aspartame). Unsweetened products meet all the conditions for No added sugar but also can't contain any intense sweeteners, or the sweet sugar alcohols - like sorbitol, mannitol, glycerol, xylitol, isomalt, maltitol syrup, or lactitol. They may still contain natural (intrinsic) sugar if they're made out of sugar-rich ingredients like dried fruit.
Reduced Fat/Sugar/Carbohydrate/Energy	Reduced or Lite foods must contain at least 25% less fat/sugars/ carbohydrate/energy than the same amount of a regular version.
Sodium or Salt	Low means no more than 120 mg/100 mL (liquids) or 100 g (solids). No added means neither the food nor any of its added ingredients contain any added sodium compound, including salt. Unsalted means there's no added sodium compounds, including salt, in it.
Vitamins and Minerals	A food must contain at least 10% of the RDI (recommended daily intake) of a named vitamin or mineral per serve to be able to say it contains it. It needs to contain 25% of the RDI serve to call itself a Good source . (Potassium and sodium are dealt with separately.)

*Working out claims about sugar is tricky, because it depends how you define it. As far as the nutrition claims part of the FSC is concerned "Sugars" generally means the common ones like glucose, fructose and sucrose. Only some claims - like No added sugars - expand the "Sugars" category to include many - but not all - additional sweet substances which are not normally counted (see list). Watch out for extra sugar and calories "hidden" in ingredients like fruit juices, syrups, oligo- or polysaccharide additives, fruit purees or "natural" sources like dried fruits.