NUTRITION INFORMATION PANELS (NIPS)

LIFE EDUCATION
Learning with Harold

Summary

Nutrition Information Panels (NIPs) are the small tables of numbers found on most food packets. They tell us how much energy, protein, total fat, saturated fat, total carbohydrate, sugar, and sodium there is in every 100 grams or millilitres of the food. This lets us compare these values between similar foods. NIPs must also show how much of each of these substances is in each serve and how big that serve is.

Sometimes NIPs tell us about other nutrients. If the maker of the food (manufacturer) wants to say their product contains another nutrient – like fibre – they must add information about it to their NIP. They might also want to show what fraction of an adult's daily need for a nutrient is provided by each serve of the food: they can do this by adding percentage Daily Intake (%DI) or recommended Daily Intake (%RDI) values to a NIP.

What are NIPs?

Manufacturers must put nutrition information panels (NIPs) on their foods. The simplest ones tell us the average amount of seven components of the food per serving and also per 100 g (for solids) or 100 mL (liquids). The 'big seven' substances are: energy (as kilojoules or kilocalories)*, protein (g), total fat (g), fat that is present as saturated fat (g), total carbohydrate (g), carbohydrate that is present as sugars (g), and sodium (mg). NIPs must also show the size of the average serve used for the NIP and tell us how many of these serves there are in each packet, pot, jar, bar, box, or bottle that is sold.

What other substances might be on a NIP?

If a food claims to contain a substance – or a certain level of it – that is not covered by the big seven then the NIP must also carry information about that substance. Items commonly added to NIPs include dietary fibre, vitamins and minerals. You may also see fats further broken down on NIPs into trans, polyunsaturated, monounsaturated, and omega-3, -6 and -9s. If a food is usually eaten with another food (like cereal with milk) the NIP should have an extra column showing values for an average made-up serve combing the nutrition values of both foods.

* 1 kilocalorie (kCal) equals 4.2 kilojoules (kJ). g = gram, mL = millilitre, mg = milligram, µg - microgram. There are 1000 g in a kilogram (kg), 1000 mL in a litre, 1000 mg in a gram, and 1000 µg in a milligram.

Nutrition Information
(AVERAGE)
servings per package - 9
average serving size - 40g (1 metric cup†)

	quantity per serving	% daily intake ▲ per serving	per serve with 1/2 cup skim milk	quantity per 100g
ENERGY	620 kJ	**7%**	810 kJ	1550 kJ
PROTEIN	7.3 g	**15%**	11.9 g	18.2 g
FAT, TOTAL	0.3 g	**0.5%**	0.4 g	0.8 g
- SATURATED	<0.1 g	**0.2%**	0.2 g	0.1 g
CARBOHYDRATE	27.2 g	**9%**	33.7 g	68.0 g
- SUGARS	10.0 g	**11%**	16.4 g	24.9 g
DIETARY FIBRE	2.6 g	**9%**	2.6 g	6.5 g
SODIUM #	130 mg	**6%**	186 mg	325 mg
		%RDI*		
THIAMIN (VIT B1)	0.28 mg	**25%**	0.33 mg	0.69 mg
RIBOFLAVIN (VIT B2)	0.42 mg	**25%**	0.68 mg	1.06 mg
NIACIN	2.5 mg	**25%**	2.6 mg	6.2 mg
VITAMIN B6	0.4 mg	**25%**	0.4 mg	1.0 mg
FOLATE	100 µg	**50%**	106 µg	250 µg
CALCIUM	200 mg	**25%**	359 mg	500mg
IRON	3.0 mg	**25%**	3.1 mg	7.5 mg
ZINC	1.2 mg	**10%**	1.7 mg	3.0 mg

† Cup measurement is approximate and is only to be used as a guide. If you have any specific dietary requirements please weigh your serving.

(taken from Kellogg's Special K Forest Berries 2018)

Why do some panels show percentage DIs and RDIs?

Percentage Daily Intake (%DI) per serve is added voluntarily by manufacturers for the big seven substance, and sometimes for fibre. Daily Intake (DI) values are a daily amount of each substance that researchers agree an "average" adult should eat. The %DI column tells you how much of that total a single serve of the food is providing.
Percentage Recommended Daily or Dietary Intakes (%RDIs) are similar to %DIs but used only for vitamins and minerals. Percentage RDIs must be shown when claims about certain vitamins and minerals are made but can also be added voluntarily. The NZ Food Standards Code (FSC) provides standard values of adult DIs and RDIs which manufacturers must use for %DI or %RDI information. They don't have values for children.

Why don't some foods have a NIP?

There's no need for a NIP if a food is sold unpackaged or only packaged when it's sold (like a bun at a deli). Small packs (smaller than a pack of chewing gum) don't have to have NIPs because you can't fit all the information on them. And herbs, spices, mineral water, tea and coffee don't have NIPs because they have no significant nutritional value.

What's the difference between per serve and per 100 g?

Per 100 g values allow us to compare the amount of a substance across similar products – so would be useful if we want to find the yoghurt with the lowest sugar or fat content.
Per serve values show how much of each substance we are likely to be getting in a particular food. Manufacturers can decide how big or small to make their serves but they have to be realistic. NIPs often give examples (two biscuits, half a bottle) to help us imagine serve sizes. If only a weight (g) or volume (mL) is given and you can't imagine what that looks like, mentally divide the contents by the number of serves per pack to get an idea of serve size. You must multiply all per serve values by the number of serves you actually eat.

Are there any values I should be looking out for on NIPs?

We're all different and we all change: a pre-schooler, a growing teenager, an athlete, and an elderly person will have different food requirements. However, it's generally agreed that it's a good idea to aim for foods with the lowest levels of saturated fats, no trans fats and less than 120 mg sodium/100 g. If you are concerned about weight gain, aim for foods with less than 10g total fat/100 g (dairy with less than 2 g) as fat delivers more than twice as much energy (kJ/g) as carbohydrates or sugars. The NZ Nutrition Foundation suggests girls and boys aged 9 to 13 years need 35 to 40 g protein per day from all sources. Over 30 g sugars/100 g is generally considered a large amount of sugar and less than 5 g sugars/100 g is small – so check out those values on NIPs as some bars and cereals have sugar values of 40 g to 50 g/100 g! It's not a good idea for kids to eat cereals or bars with more than 15 g fibre/100 g but try to find ones with more than 6 g/100 g.

USEFUL LINKS

NZ Nutrition Foundation, n.d. https://www.nutritionfoundation.org.nz/nutrition-facts

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