

Label Reading 101

A Guide to Smarter Food Choices

1. The Golden Rule: No Label is the Best Label

- The majority of your grocery cart should be made up of whole foods — items that don't need an ingredient list:
 - Fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Whole grains (buckwheat, rice)
 - Fresh meat, poultry, or fish
 - Eggs, nuts, and seeds
- These foods are nutrient-dense, unprocessed, and support your overall health without hidden additives.

2. What to Look For When You Buy Packaged Foods:

- Short ingredient lists — ideally fewer than 5–8 ingredients.
- Whole food sources — “almonds,” “buckwheat,” “sea salt.”
- Recognizable ingredients — if you wouldn't cook with it at home, question it.
- Healthy fats — look for olive oil or avocado oil. Sunflower or grapeseed oil are also acceptable.
- High fibre, low sugar — aim for at least 3g of fibre per serving and under 5g of sugar per serving.
- Minimal additives — choose products without artificial colors, flavours, or preservatives.

3. Ingredients to Limit or Avoid

- Avoid gluten or cream based sauces and products
- Unhealthy Oils — Canola, palm, soybean, corn, safflower, cottonseed & vegetable oil blends.
- Added Sugars — High fructose corn syrup, glucose, maltose, sucrose, agave, rice syrup, cane juice, etc. Sugar hides under 50+ names — when in doubt, scan the list for anything ending in “-ose.”
- Refined Carbs & Fillers — Enriched wheat flour, maltodextrin, modified starch, corn syrup solids
- Artificial Additives — Artificial flavours, “natural flavours” (not a regulated term), dyes (Red 40, Yellow 5, etc.), artificial sweeteners (aspartame, sucralose, acesulfame potassium), MSG

4. Quick Label Check Tips:

- Ingredients are listed by weight — the first 3 make up most of the product. If sugar or oil is in the first three ingredients, it's a treat, not a staple.
- Watch serving sizes — some snacks list unrealistic portions. Example: the serving size is ½ a bar — but most people will eat the whole protein bar at once.
- “Buzzwords” don't mean healthy — ignore front labels that say “natural,” “organic,” “gluten-free,” or “low fat.” Always check what's listed on the back.

