

# Understanding Food Labels

## *What is a Food label?*

Food Label refers to any descriptive material comprising words, pictures and diagrams that appear on the package of food.

It shall be marked on or securely attached in a prominent and conspicuous position to the package, containing the following information in English.

## *Types of information made on Food labels*

The product name: an acceptable common name or description which is sufficient to indicate the true nature of the food product. The description may include information on the physical condition of the food or the specific treatment it has undergone (powdered, frozen, concentrated, smoked, etc.).

The Ingredients list: a statement listing all the ingredients and additives used in the product. If the exact quantities of ingredients and additives used are not declared, these items should be listed in descending order of the proportions by weight in which they are present.

Quantity: the minimum quantity of the food present in the package expressed in terms of volumetric measure (for liquid food) or net weight (for solid food).

### Origin:

*For imported food*, the name of the country of origin of the product as well as the name and address of the local importer, distributor or agent are to be declared on the product label.

*For locally manufactured food*, the name and address of the manufacturer, packer or local vendor are to be declared.

Date-marking, meaning declaration of expiry date to indicate the durable shelf life of food products. The expiry dates of prepacked food products may be declared in one of the following ways.

- “**USE BY** (*here insert the day, month and year*)”;
- “**SELL BY** (*here insert the day, month and year*)”;
- “**EXPIRY DATE** (*here insert the day, month and year*)”; or
- “**BEST BEFORE** (*here insert the day, month and year*)”.

Dates declared in any of these forms will be taken as the dates after which the durable shelf life of the products would have expired. When the validity of the expiry date is dependent on the storage condition, the storage direction of the product should also be included on its label.

Warning Statement: is required to be declared on the label for product containing certain ingredients/additives.

- Food products containing royal jelly are required to be labelled with a statement, "Warning - this product may not be suitable for asthma and allergy sufferers".
- Food products containing aspartame are required to be labelled with a statement, "Phenylketonurics: contains phenylalanine".
- Food products containing tartrazine are required to declare the presence of tartrazine with words like, (a) tartrazine, (b) colour (102), (c) colour (FD&C Yellow #5) or other equivalent terms

Pictorial illustrations: Recipes, suggestions or pictorial illustration on how to serve the food may be included in food labels as long as they are closely accompanied by a suitable expression, such as "Recipe" or "Serving Suggestion".

Nutritional information: describes the energy, protein, fat and carbohydrate contents of the food declared based on per serving or per 100grams or 100mls basis. When declaration is based on per serving basis, the serving size and number of servings per package must be made known to consumers.

Nutrition Labelling: is currently mandatory only for food products which carry nutrition claims. Food products that carry nutrition claims must incorporate an acceptable nutrition panel in their labels, stating the energy, protein, fat, carbohydrate contents, as well as the quantities of any additional nutrients of which claims are made.

Nutrition claim means any statement, suggestion or implication in any labelling, presentation or advertising of a food that it has particular nutrition properties. Examples of nutrition claims are "Source of Protein", "High in Fibre", "Low in Fat", "Cholesterol Free" and "Sugar Free".

### ***Further information***

Food labelling requirements on the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority website  
<http://www.ava.gov.sg/FoodSector/FoodLabelingAdvertisement/>

The Singapore Food Regulations can also be downloaded from the following website:  
<http://www.ava.gov.sg/NR/rdonlyres/0CA18578-7610-4917-BB67-C7DF4B96504B/11405/FoodRegulations1.pdf>

There are currently 19 broad categories of prepacked food products that are required to be marked with expiry date under the Food Regulations (*Annex I*).

These categories cover a wide spectrum of food products and include products with a short shelf-life (e.g. tofu and pasteurized milk), products which are prone to changes in quality over time (e.g. vitaminised drink and cooking oil), products which are more susceptible to insect infestation (e.g. flour and breakfast cereals) and products for more vulnerable individuals (e.g. infant food).

## **DATE-MARKING OF PREPACKED FOOD**

- 1.** Cream, reduced cream, light cream, whipped cream and sour cream excluding sterilised canned cream.
- 2.** Cultured milk and cultured milk drink.
- 3.** Pasteurised milk and pasteurised milk drink.
- 4.** Yoghurt, low-fat yoghurt, fat-reduced yoghurt, non-fat yoghurt and yoghurt products.
- 5.** Pasteurised fruit juice and pasteurised fruit juice drink.
- 6.** Pasteurised vegetable juice and pasteurised vegetable juice drink.
- 7.** Tofu, “tauhu” or “doufu”, a soya beancurd product made of basically soya beans, water and a coagulant, including “egg tofu”, “taukua” or “dougan”, and the soft soya beancurd desert known as “tauhui”, “tofa” or “douhua”, but excluding the oil fried tofu in the form of a pouch known as “taupok”, and the dried beancurd stick.
- 8.** Food which is stored or required to be stored at a chilling temperature to maintain or prolong its durable life, but excluding raw fruits and vegetables.
- 9.** Vitaminised fruit juice and vitaminised fruit juice drink.
- 10.** Vitaminised vegetable juice and vitaminised vegetable juice drink.
- 11.** Liquid milk and liquid milk products excluding condensed milk, sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk and canned sterilised milk and milk products.
- 12.** Flour.
- 13.** Salad dressing.
- 14.** Mayonnaise.
- 15.** Raisins and sultanas.
- 16.** Chocolate, milk chocolate and chocolate confectionery in which the characteristic ingredient is chocolate or cocoa, with or without the addition of fruits and nuts.
- 17.** Breakfast-cereal with or without fruits and nuts except cereal in cans.
- 18.** Infants’ food.
- 19.** Edible cooking oils.