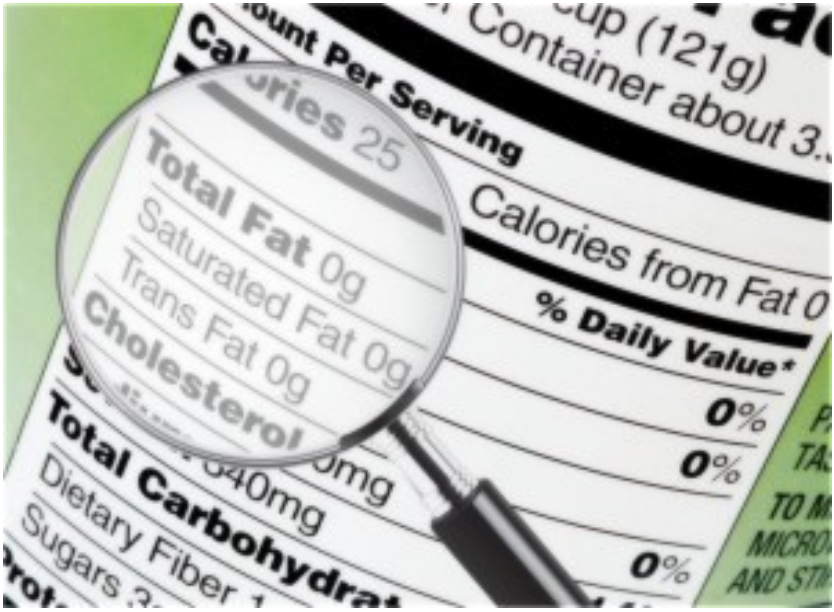
East Lancashire Hospitals
NHS Trust

Reading Food Labels When You Have Diabetes



East Lancashire Children and Young Peoples Diabetes Team

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Food Labels

Keeping track of the amount of carbohydrates eaten for each meal or snack is important to help you and your child calculate the correct amount of insulin to keep blood glucose levels on target.

To do this with processed foods you need to know how to read food labels. The information on them will help you choose healthy foods lower in sugar which help you manage your child's blood sugar. It is also more accurate to work out the carbohydrate content of food portions rather than just by using the carbs and cals book alone, trying to match the pictures in the book to the actual portions on your plate.

Food labels give you lots of information. Some of this is useful and some is not. Useful information includes:

- The weight of the portion and total weight of the product.
- How much sugar is in the food so you can decide which product is the lowest sugar and, therefore, the healthiest option for you or your child.
- The amount of carbohydrates there are, so you can accurately calculate the amount of insulin that is needed, using your ratio of carbs to insulin if you are carbohydrate counting.

Misleading information can be things like 'light', low sugar, no added sugar and natural sugars, as these are not monitored by law and could mean anything.

Understanding Nutritional Information

Per 100g is the amount of each nutrient in 100g of the product.

Serving size tells you how much of the food makes up a single serving. Although, this may not be the same as your serving size

	Per 100g	30g serving with 125mls of semi-skimmed milk
ENERGY	1586Kj / 374kcals	727kJ / 171kcals
PROTEIN	15g	9g
CARBOHYDRATE	75g	28g
of which sugars	17g	11g
of which starch	58g	17g
FAT	1.5g	2.5g
of which saturates	0.5g	1.5g
FIBRE	2.5g	0.8g
SODIUM	0.45g	0.2g
SALT	1.15g	0.5g

Sugar shows the amount of natural and added sugar in 100g or one serving.

Total carbohydrate tells you how many grams of carbohydrate is in 100g or one serving. Includes natural sugar, added sugar and starch.

Total Carbohydrates (carbs)

This is what to look for when working out how much insulin to give your child. Total carbohydrate includes carbohydrate from natural and added sugar, and starch. Because all types of carbohydrate can affect blood glucose, it's important to use the Total grams when counting carbs, not just the grams of sugar.

How do I tell if foods have added sugar?

The amount of added sugar in a food or drink is not always given. The figures for sugar are for total sugar and don't tell you how much of this comes from natural sugars, (such as fruit and milk), and how much comes from added sugar. For example, natural yoghurt contains natural sugar, but flavoured yoghurt contains both added and natural sugar. Therefore, you need to read the ingredients to work out if they have added sugar.

Some foods and drink don't have the word 'sugar' in the ingredients list but still have sugar added. Honey, sucrose, glucose, glucose syrup, dextrose, fructose, lactose, maltose, hydrolysed starch, corn and maize syrup are all added sugars.

Check the ingredients list - ingredients are listed in order of weight, starting with the ingredient that weighs the most, down to the ingredient that weighs the least. So if any of these are within the first three ingredients, the food is likely to contain more added sugar. Choose an alternative if possible, be mindful of the portion your child eats and always eat with a meal so that spikes in blood glucose are minimised.

Portion Size

It is important to look at the serving size when calculating carbohydrates.

A manufacturer's definition of a portion or serving size may be different from you or your child's. In general, the portion sizes given are suitable for adults over the age of 18. Younger children and teenagers may need different amounts.

If you or your child's serving size is different from the label you can work out the amount of carbohydrate by weighing their food portion and comparing the amount to how many carbohydrates there are in 100g of that food portion. You can do this using this calculation:

$$\text{Carbs in your portion} = \frac{\text{Carbs per 100g (Food Label)}}{100} \times \text{Actual Weight of the Food}$$

The calculation is the one we teach people to use in our carbohydrate counting education. All we are doing is working out how much carbohydrate there is in 1g of your food or drink portion. Once we know what this is we can just multiply that 1g by the actual weight of your food portion to get the total carb content of your food portion.

The Traffic Light System

The traffic light system for 'front of pack'' labelling shows how many calories are in the food or drink and is also colour coded to show whether a food is low (green), medium (amber) or high (red) in fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.

Though the traffic light system doesn't include the total amount of carbohydrate, it can be an easy way to check at a glance how healthy a food is as it shows the sugar in the portion.

Try to choose foods for your child with more greens and ambers and avoid foods labelled red for sugars.

Extra Tips

- Keep an eye on reduced fat foods. Many contain more sugar as manufacturers add sugar to compensate for the altered taste and texture caused by the fat being removed. Look at the whole label to be sure.

- Products marketed as ‘diabetic’ or ‘suitable for diabetics’ aren’t recommended. These products can still contain carbohydrates and consuming large amounts can have a laxative effect, causing bloating, flatulence and diarrhoea. You could look at low sugar products as they might be better choices.

- When comparing similar products it can be best to look at the amount of carbohydrates in 100g and select the lowest. By using the 100g column you know you are always comparing the same quantity.

- You can also compare products by looking at sugars in the portion of the food or 100g to find the lowest sugar.

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