

E- Guide On:

Decode Before

You Buy!

About the Author:



Meet Margi Dhaval Mankad, a passionate Clinical Dietitian & Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) who believes that food isn't just fuel — it's therapy. With over 3+ years of hands-on experience, Margi is involved in helping people heal and thrive through the power of personalized nutrition.

A postgraduate in Clinical Nutrition & Dietetics from Symbiosis University, Pune, Margi combines science-backed research with real-life practicality. Her work on *hedonic hunger and mindful eating* has been featured in Scopus-indexed journals.

Beyond the hospital walls, Margi has guided hundreds of clients globally, helping them transform their health from managing diabetes and PCOS to balancing hormones and building sustainable habits. She also loves simplifying complex nutrition science through talks, workshops, and online guides that empower people to make informed food choices.

Her mission? To make nutrition less confusing and more empowering — so you can enjoy your food, understand your body, and make every bite count 🧠 ✨

• INTRODUCTION:

In today's supermarket aisles, every package screams "healthy," "natural," or "sugar-free" but not everything that looks good on the front is actually good for your body. The real truth lies on the *back* of the pack in the fine print of the food label. Learning how to read food labels isn't about counting calories obsessively, it's about making informed, mindful choices that support your health goals. Once you understand how to decode serving sizes, spot hidden sugars, check sodium and fat levels, and read ingredients smartly, you'll never fall for marketing traps again. This guide simplifies food label reading using research-backed references from trusted bodies like **WHO**, **FSSAI**, and **FDA**, so you can shop confidently and nourish yourself wisely — one label at a time.

QUICK ESSENTIALS – 3 RULES TO ALWAYS REMEMBER

Start with the serving size:

Nutrition values (calories, sugar, fat, sodium) are listed *per serving*, not per package — if you eat multiple servings, multiply the numbers.

Check the ingredient list first:

Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight — the first few ingredients tell you what the product mostly contains.

Focus on the nutrients to limit (saturated fat, added sugars, sodium) and nutrients to get more of (fiber, protein, whole grains, vitamins/minerals):

Use these to compare similar products.

- **HOW TO READ NUTRITION LABEL – STEP BY STEP**

NUTRITIONAL FACTS (Approximate composition per 100g when packed)			
Energy	900 kcal	Fats	
Protein	0 g	Saturated Fatty Acids	12 g
Carbohydrates	0 g	Poly Unsaturated Fatty acids	67 g
Sugar	0 g	Mono Unsaturated Fatty Acids	21 g
Cholesterol	0 mg	Trans Fatty Acids	0 g
Added Vitamin A*	750 mcg		
Added Vitamin D*	5 mcg		

Marketed by :

Manufactured and Packed at :

For consumer feedback, please contact us at :

 REUSE
RECYCLE
RECYCLE

 **100% veg**

REFINED SUNFLOWER OIL

Fortified with Vitamin A & D

M.R.P. : ₹100/-
(Inclusive of all Taxes)

Batch No. : PS200

NET QUANTITY AT 30 C : 1 Litre

Packed on : July 13, 2017
(Best before nine months from packaging when kept away from heat & light)

INGREDIENTS :
Refined Sunflower Oil, Permitted Antioxidants,
Vitamin A (750 mcg per 100 g oil),
Vitamin D (5 mcg per 100 g oil)

FREE FROM ARGEMONE OIL

 9 501101530003

 **fssai**
LIC. No. 1234567891234567

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LOOK FOR THESE LOGO'S



- FSSAI LOGO with LICENCE NUMBER
- ISI mark for packaged drinking and mineral water and certain processed foods such as infant food, milk and skimmed milk powder
- AGMARK for all agricultural products such as vegetable oil, pulses, cereals, spices, honey, fruits and vegetables
- GREEN dot for vegetarian food
- RED dot for non-vegetarian food, including egg
- Logo for fortified food

HOW TO READ NUTRITION LABEL & WHAT EACH SECTION MEANS

Nutrition Facts	
1	8 servings per container Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)
2	Amount per serving Calories 230
3	% Daily Value*
	Total Fat 8g 10%
	Saturated Fat 1g 5%
	<i>Trans Fat</i> 0g
	Cholesterol 0mg 0%
	Sodium 160mg 7%
	Total Carbohydrate 37g 13%
	Dietary Fiber 4g 14%
	Total Sugars 12g
	Includes 10g Added Sugars 20%
	Protein 3g
4	Vitamin D 2mcg 10%
	Calcium 260mg 20%
	Iron 8mg 45%
5	Potassium 235mg 6%
	<small>* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.</small>

1 — Serving size & servings per container

- **Why it matters:** Labels report nutrients per serving. Packages often contain multiple servings and what looks like one portion may actually be two or three. If you eat the whole pack, you may be eating 2–4× the listed calories and nutrients.
- **Tip:** Compare the serving size to how much you actually eat. Convert cups / grams into a quick visual (e.g., 1 cup cooked rice ≈ a tennis ball) so you don't unintentionally double the calories.

2— Calories (per serving) & calories from fat (if shown):

- Calories tell you energy, higher-calorie = more energy per serving. For weight management, check calories and how many servings you'll consume.

3 — Macronutrients: Total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, carbohydrates, fiber, sugars, protein

- **Fat:** Look at **saturated** and **trans-fat** (these are the ones to limit- Reference range given ahead). High amount of these can lead to development of obesity, cardiovascular disorders, heart attacks and other metabolic disorders.
- **Carbs & sugars:** Look at total carbohydrates, dietary fiber (aim higher), and added sugars (aim lower). Many labels now show added sugars separately — that's the sugar manufacturers add. Total sugar will always be Added sugar + Natural Sugar
- **Protein:** The more the better! If you're buying a high-protein product, look for at least 10 g of protein per serving.

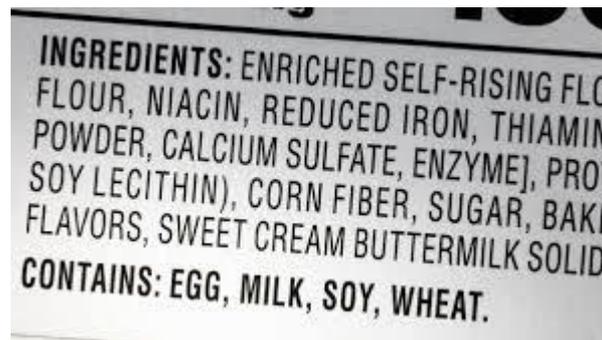
4 — Micronutrients: sodium, vitamins, minerals

- **Sodium:** High in many packaged foods; watch amounts if you manage blood pressure.
- **Vitamins & minerals:** Often shown as % Daily Value (DV). These tell you how a serving contributes to daily needs.

5 — % Daily Value (%DV)

- **How to use it:** %DV helps you interpret if an item is high or low in a nutrient.
 - **5% DV or less = low**
 - **20% DV or more = high**
- Use %DV to compare similar foods quickly (e.g., which snack has less sodium per serving).

6 — Ingredient list



- **Order matters:** Ingredients are listed by weight (most → least). If sugar or an oil is first, the product is mostly sugar/oil. Look for whole-food ingredients early (e.g., whole grain flour, fruits, nuts).
- **Multiple names:** Sugar appears under many names (sucrose, glucose, syrups, maltose, dextrose, fruit juice concentrate). If you see several sugar synonyms among the first ingredients — treat it as a high-sugar product.

7 — Allergen & mandatory info (varies by country)

- **What to expect (India/FSSAI example):** Labels should show manufacturer, FSSAI license, net weight, best before/use by, vegetarian/non-vegetarian mark, and allergen info. Regulations differ by country — if you're in India, check FSSAI guidance.

COMMON LABEL CLAIMS AND WHAT THEY ACTUALLY MEAN

- **Low fat / Reduced fat:** Can be lower in fat than the standard version, but may have extra sugar or calories. Always compare the Nutrition Facts.

- **Low sugar / No added sugar / Sugar free:**

- When a product claims 'zero sugar,' it may only mean it contains no refined sugar — other sugar forms might still be present.
- Sugar free generally means negligible sugar per serving — check how many servings you eat.

-Natural / Pure / Real: These terms aren't strictly defined and can be misleading.

Regulatory bodies (e.g., FSSAI) have flagged absolute claims (like "100% pure") as potentially misleading. Always read the ingredient list and nutrition panel.

-High in fiber / Source of protein / Fortified with vitamin X: These are regulated claims if used but check the %DV to know if the food gives a meaningful amount.

⚠️ QUICK "RED FLAG" NUMBERS (PER SERVING)

If you see these on your label, pause and reconsider 🙅

Nutrient	Red flag threshold per serving	What that means
Calories	> 400 kcal	Very energy dense snack/meal
Added Sugar	> 10 g (≈ 2.5 tsp)	High sugar product
Sodium	> 400 mg	High salt (especially for snacks/soups)
Saturated Fat	> 4 g	Excessive for small packaged food
Fiber	< 1 g	Low fiber, likely refined
Trans Fat / Hydrogenated Oil	Present anywhere	Avoid completely

(Reference: Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Labelling and Display Regulations, 2020 & Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling (FSSAI).

USE THE TRAFFIC LIGHT SYSTEM — ALWAYS

PUT A TRAFFIC LIGHT ON EVERY FOOD

The image shows a traffic light system for food nutrition labels. It consists of a grid with three columns: LOW (green), MED (orange), and HIGH (red). The rows represent different nutrients: Fat, Saturates, Sugars, and Salt. Each cell in the grid contains a range of values. Above the columns are circular icons with the words LOW, MED, and HIGH. Below the grid, there is a note about High Fibre.

All measures per 100g	LOW A healthier choice	MED OK most of the time	HIGH Just occasionally
Fat	3g or less	3.1g - 17.5g	More than 17.5g
Saturates	1.5g or less	1.6g - 5g	More than 5g
Sugars	5g or less	5.1g - 22.5g	More than 22.5g
Salt	0.3g or less	0.31g - 1.5g	More than 1.5g

High Fibre = **6g** or more fibre per 100g

(Reference: U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Nutrition Facts Label / What's on the Nutrition Facts Label)

SUGAR, SUGAR WHICH SUGAR?



(Reference: CDC / National Institute on Aging / U.S. Government sources on how to read labels)

Note: Whenever buying any food product which claims zero sugar, it can mean that it doesn't contain refined sugar but sugar in different forms and names can be present, so always check the food label!

SHOP SMART CHECKLIST – SAVE THIS FOR ALL YOUR GROCERY SHOPPING!

1. Serving size — does it match what I'll eat?
2. Calories × servings — how many calories if I eat the whole pack?
3. Added sugars — aim low.
4. Fiber & protein — aim high.
5. Saturated fat / trans-fat / sodium — aim low.
6. Ingredients: first 3 ingredients — whole foods? sugar/oils first?
7. Any allergens or suspicious “health” claims?

(Use the traffic light: green = good, amber = OK occasionally, red = limit.)

A CLOSING NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



Thank you for taking the time to read Decode Before You Buy. My goal with this guide was to empower you with simple, practical tools to make smarter, healthier choices when it comes to the foods you eat. Remember, small steps lead to lasting habits, and every conscious choice matters. I hope this guide helps you feel confident, informed, and in control of your nutrition journey.

*Wishing you health, balance, and happiness,
Margi Dhaval Mankad*

KEY REFERENCES AND SOURCES

1. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Nutrition Facts Label / What's on the Nutrition Facts Label.
2. Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Labelling and Display Regulations, 2020 & Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling (FSSAI).
3. Front-of-Package Labels & Consumer Behaviour / Research (PMC / NCBI).
4. American Heart Association — “Understanding Food Nutrition Labels.”
5. CDC / National Institute on Aging / U.S. Government sources on how to read labels.