

Your quick guide to: Food Labelling Advice

This Factsheet provides information on food allergens, precautionary allergen labelling (e.g. 'may contain' statements) and what to look for when reading a food label.

Food companies that produce, manufacture or package food within the UK have been given clear guidance from the [Food Standards Agency](#) about the information that is required to be included on a food label.

This information helps people that have food allergies, intolerances or dietary needs to make safe and informed choices when they are choosing food items. All pre-packaged foods must show a list of ingredients which clearly identifies all the ingredients.

New legislation, which came into force on 1 October 2021, known as 'Natasha's Law' now also requires businesses to label all food that is pre-packed for direct sale (known as PPDS) with a full list of ingredients and the **14 allergens emphasised in bold**.

This new legislation applies to foods packaged on the same site at which they are sold before being ordered, such as pre-packed sandwiches and wraps, and it will also apply to supermarket products, such as cheeses and meat from a deli counter that have been wrapped ready to serve.

Ingredients list example

INGREDIENTS:

Water, Vegetable Oils (37%) [Rapeseed Oil, Palm Oil], Olive Oil (22%), **Whey Powder (from Milk)**, Salt (1.1%), Emulsifier (Mono- and Diglycerides of Fatty Acids), Stabiliser (Sodium Alginate), Preservative (Potassium Sorbate), Colour (Carotenes), Flavouring, Vitamin A, Vitamin D.

Allergens

The allergen content of foods packaged within the European Union are required by law to include allergen information (Regulation No 1169/2011).

This legislation has been in place since December, 2014 and mandates that ingredient lists on food labels have to clearly highlight (for example in **bold type**)

that they contain any of the 14 allergens which include:

- Celery
- Cereals including gluten
- Crustaceans
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lupin
- Milk (Cows)
- Molluscs
- Mustard
- Nuts
- Peanuts
- Sesame seeds
- Soya
- Sulphur dioxide (sometimes known as sulphites)

Outside the EU, food labelling laws are different. This means that it is important to check ingredients carefully on food which has been imported from outside the EU or when buying food abroad.

Hidden allergens

Sometimes ingredients included on labels are in a different form so it may not be obvious that they are related to one of the more commonly known allergens. These are called hidden allergens.

By law if this ingredient is one of the 14 major allergens it is required to be emphasised on the label, even if it comes under a different name. For example, this ingredients list specifies that whey powder is from milk:

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Precautionary labelling

('May contain...'/'Made in a factory...' labelling statements)

Currently there is no law to recommend when these statements should be used on a food product. There is large variation between products but generally snacks and

Key facts:

All **pre-packaged food** must show a list of ingredients which clearly identifies all the ingredients

Foods packaged **within the EU** are required by law to include allergen information

Outside the EU, laws are different. It is important to check ingredients carefully on food which has been imported from outside the EU

New legislation which came into force on 1 October 2021 also requires foods **prepacked on the same site** at which they are sold, for example in a sandwich shop or deli, to be labelled with a full ingredients list, with allergens emphasised.

Allergy UK Helpline

Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm:

Call: 01322 619 898

Email: info@allergyuk.org
allergyuk.org

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dry foods such as cereals, cereal bars, chocolate, biscuits and nuts are at greater risk of crosscontamination with allergens. Some people with food allergy will need to avoid products that include these precautionary statements. Guidance on the need to avoid foods these statements should come from a healthcare professional.

Other allergens

It is possible to have a food allergy to food allergens, that are not included in the top 14, for example chick peas, lentils, corn and kiwi. It is therefore important to read ingredients lists carefully as while these allergens may be included they will not be emphasised in bold, italicised or underlined.

In the UK all ingredients have to be labelled correctly, however you should still find out all the names of the ingredients and products that can be derived from the food that causes a reaction.

Key messages

- Food labels need to be checked every time a product is purchased. Even if foods have previously been considered 'safe' manufacturers can change ingredients without notifying consumers.
- Always check the food labels on items that have not been bought before.
- Be vigilant about packaging changes or health claims such as 'new tastier recipe'. This may indicate that the ingredients have changed.
- If you haven't purchased a particular food for a while check the ingredients before consumption. They may have changed.
- When buying unpackaged or 'loose' food from a café or market always check that there are precautions against cross contamination.
- Foods that have been prepared and pre-packaged on the same premises, such as a sandwich outlet or deli, must now be labelled with a full ingredients list with the 14 allergens emphasised in bold
- If it is not clear from the label, or there is any doubt after verbal communication on the allergen content of a food, then do not take the risk.