

Food Labels

Use by

You will see "**use by**" dates on food that goes off quickly, such as smoked fish, meat products and ready-prepared salads.

Don't use any food or drink after the end of the "**use by**" date on the label, even if it looks and smells fine. This is because using it after this date could put your health at risk.

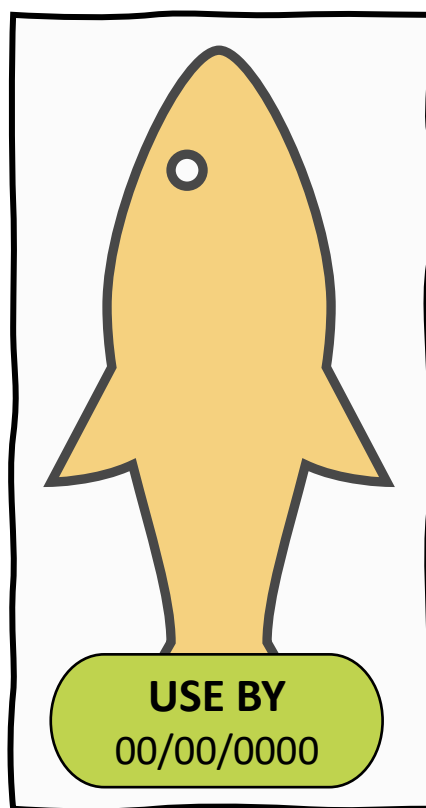
For the "**use by**" date to be a valid guide, you must follow storage instructions such as "**keep in a refrigerator**". If you don't follow these instructions, the food will spoil more quickly and you may risk food poisoning.

Once a food with a "**use by**" date on it has been opened, you also need to follow any instructions such as "**eat within three days of opening**".

But remember, if the "**use by**" is tomorrow, then you must use the food by the end of tomorrow, even if the label says "eat within a week of opening" and you have only opened the food today.

If a food can be frozen its life can be extended beyond the "**use by**" date. But make sure you follow any instructions on the pack, such as "cook from frozen" or "defrost thoroughly before use and use within 24 hours".

"**Use by**" dates are the most important date to consider, as these relate to food safety.



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Best before

"**Best before**" dates appear on a wide range of frozen, dried, tinned and other foods.

"**Best before**" dates are about quality, not safety. When the date is passed, it doesn't mean that the food will be harmful, but it might begin to lose its flavour and texture.

Eggs have a shelf life of 28 days (from date laid to best before date). By law, eggs must reach the final consumer within 21 days from the date they have been laid. This date is known as the sell-by date.

After this date, the quality of the egg will deteriorate and if any salmonella bacteria are present, they could multiply to high levels and could make a person ill. This means that eggs need to be delivered to the consumer at least seven days before the best before date. The consumer then has seven days to use the eggs at home.

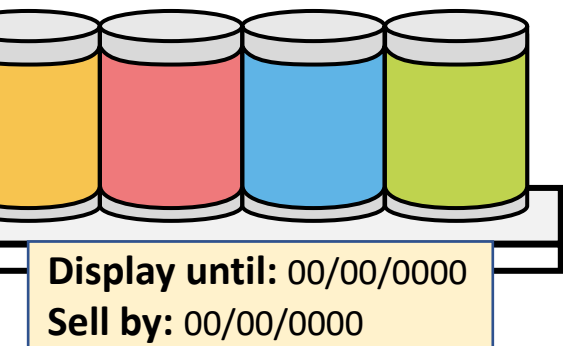
Eggs should be cooked thoroughly until both yolk and white are solid, or if they are used in dishes where they will be fully cooked such as a cake. Cooking eggs until both the white and yolk are solid will kill any bacteria, such as salmonella.

Every year in the UK we throw away 7.2m tonnes of food and drink, most of which could have been eaten. So think carefully before throwing away food past its "**best before**" date.

Remember, the "best before" date will only be accurate if the food is stored according to the instructions on the label, such as "**store in a cool dry place**" or "**keep in the fridge once opened**".



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Display until and sell by

Retailers often use "sell by" and "display until" dates on their shelves, mainly for stock control purposes. These aren't required by law and are instructions for shop staff, not for shoppers. The important dates for you to look for are the "use by" and "best before" dates.

Health claims

Food packaging often makes health claims for the food, such as, "**helps maintain a healthy heart**", or "**helps aid digestion**".



Since 2007, specific rules have been put in place to help prevent misleading claims. Any claims made about the nutritional and health benefits of a food must be based on science. Only claims the European Commission has approved can be used on food packaging.

General claims about benefits to overall good health, such as "**healthy**" or "**good for you**", are only allowed if accompanied by an approved claim. This means that these claims must be backed up by an explanation of why the food is "**healthy**".

Labels are not allowed to claim that food can treat, prevent or cure any disease or medical condition. These sorts of claims can only be made for licensed medicines.

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Light or lite

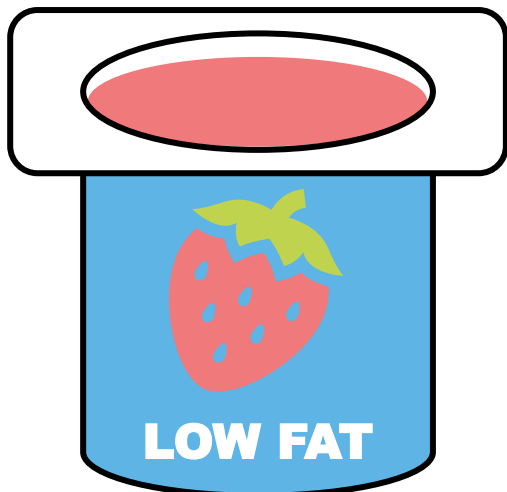
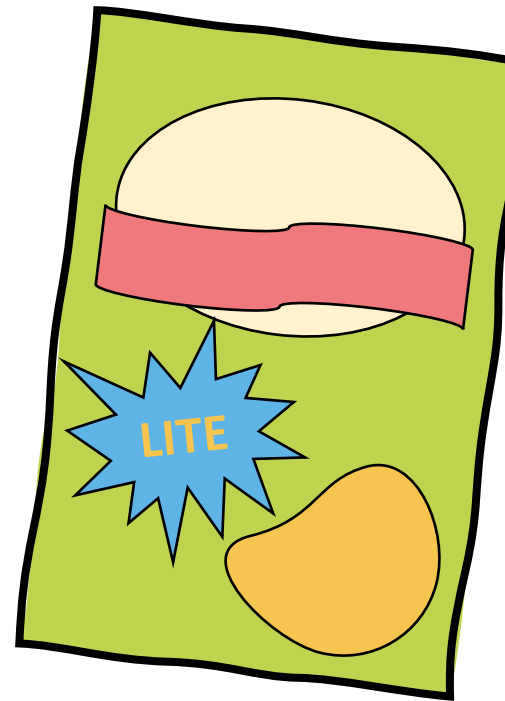
To say that a food is "**light**" or "**lite**", it must be at least 30% lower in at least one typical value, such as calories or fat, than standard products.

The label must explain exactly what has been reduced and by how much, for example "**light: 30% less fat**".

To get the whole picture about a product and compare it properly with similar foods, you will need to take a close look at the nutrition label. The easiest way to compare products is to look at the information per 100g.

You may be surprised at how little difference there is between foods that carry claims and those that don't. A "**light**" or "**lite**" version of one brand of crisps may contain the same amount of fat or calories as the standard version of another brand.

Those tempting biscuits that claim to be light on fat can have more calories than you think, so always check the label.



Low fat

A claim that a food is low in fat may only be made where the product contains no more than 3g of fat per 100g for solids or 1.5g of fat per 100ml for liquids (1.8g of fat per 100ml for semi-skimmed milk).

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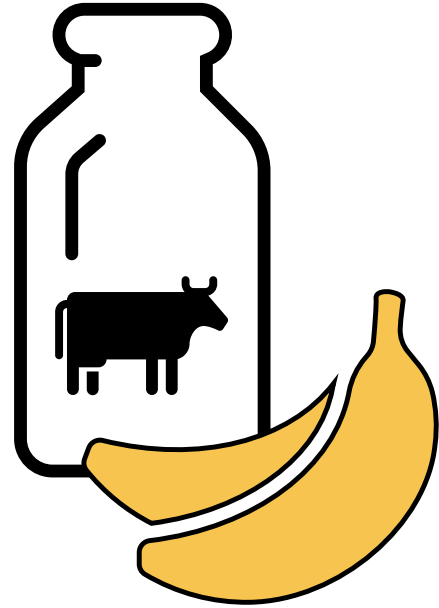
No added sugar

This usually means that the food has not had sugar added to it as an ingredient.

A food that has "no added sugar" might still taste sweet and can still contain sugar.

Sugars occur naturally in food such as fruit and milk. But we don't need to cut down on these types of sugar: it is food containing added sugars that we should be cutting down on.

Just because a food contains "no added sugar", this does not necessarily mean it has a low sugar content. The food may contain ingredients that have a naturally high sugar content (such as fruit), or have added milk, which contains lactose, a type of sugar that occurs naturally in milk.

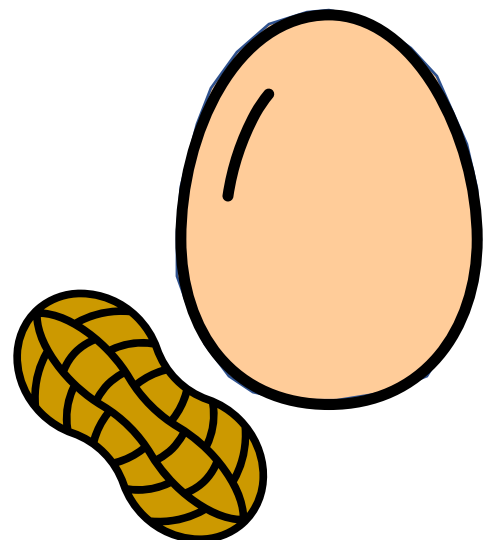


Unsweetened

This usually means that no sugar or sweetener has been added to the food to make it taste sweet. This doesn't necessarily mean that the food will not contain naturally occurring sugars found in fruit or milk.

Ingredients

The ingredients in the food, including additives, are listed in descending order of weight at the time they were used to make the food. If flavourings are used, the label must say so. The ingredients list must also highlight any allergens (foods that some people are allergic to), such as eggs, nuts and soya where used as ingredients. As well as this information, there will usually also be the manufacturer's name and address, a datemark, instructions for safe storage and the weight of the product.



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Nutrition information

You often see nutrition labels on food packaging giving a breakdown of the nutritional content of the food.

Manufacturers are currently required by law to give this information if the product also makes a nutrition claim such as "**low fat**", or a health claim such as "**calcium helps build strong bones**", or if vitamins or minerals have been added to the product. Manufacturers often also give nutrition information voluntarily, and under new EU rules will be required to provide this information from December 2016, regardless of whether a nutrition or health claim has been made or vitamins or minerals have been added to the product.

When nutrition information is given on a label, as a minimum it must, under the new rules, show the amount of each of the following per 100g or 100ml of the food:

- energy (in kJ and kcal)
- fat (in g)
- saturates (in g)
- carbohydrate (in g)
- sugars (in g)
- protein (in g)
- salt (in g)
- plus the amount of any nutrient for which a claim has been made

Sometimes you will also see amounts per serving or per portion, but this must be in addition to the 100g or 100ml breakdown. Remember, the manufacturer's idea of what constitutes a "**serving**" or a "**portion**" might not be the same as yours.

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
kJ kcal	g	g	g	g
	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
%	%	%	%	%