

# Food Labelling



# Food Labelling

*NSCC Edition*

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NSCC



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# PREFACE

This textbook provides the novice learner with a foundational understanding of Food Labelling.

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# Legend

This textbook is best viewed online in the “Read Book” format available through Pressbooks. The Read Book format enables all accessible multimedia content. Users can also download a PDF or request a print copy through eCampusOntario’s Open Library.

Throughout this text you will encounter various learning-teaching strategies. Here is a short summary:

- **Textual information** describes the content.
- **Points of Consideration** provide additional information to push your thinking beyond the main point to consider in practice. Points of consideration are visually separated from the rest of the textual information using a text box.
- Findings that require intervention, highlighted as **take action**, such as abnormal or critical findings or findings that require health promotion.
- **Activities** give you an opportunity to evaluate your learning.
- **Videos** and **podcasts** help you understand the information in a different way.
- Important phrases are **bolded**.
- Unfamiliar and complex terms are bolded and included in the **glossary** at the end of the book. If reading the book online, hover your cursor over a bolded word to reveal the definition.

# About eCampusOntario and Authors

## About eCampusOntario

eCampusOntario is a not-for-profit corporation funded by the Government of Ontario. It serves as a centre of excellence in online and technology-enabled learning for all publicly funded colleges and universities in Ontario and has embarked on a bold mission to widen access to post-secondary education and training in Ontario. This textbook is part of eCampusOntario's Open Library, which provides free learning resources in a wide range of subject areas. These open resources can be assigned by instructors for their classes, downloaded by learners to electronic devices or printed through the University of Waterloo print on demand service. These free and open resources are customizable to meet a wide range of learning needs, and we invite instructors to review and adopt the resources for use in their courses.

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# NUTRITION LABELLING

By Jennifer L. Lapum, Lisa Seto Nielsen, and Rezwana Rahman





# Self Assessment



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/foodlabel/?p=58#h5p-4>

# What is Nutrition Labelling?

**Nutrition labelling** is information included on labels of packaged foods about nutrient content. Considering the health impact of foods and effects related to obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and other conditions, there has been a shift in many countries to mandate and regulate nutrition labelling (Viola, Bianchi, Croce, & Ceretti, 2016). The Canadian government has made efforts to create labels that provide necessary information for consumers. However, it is important to be aware that nutrition labelling is often poorly understood by consumers. Health professionals are expected to be knowledgeable about how to read and interpret nutrition labels (including **nutrition facts tables** [NFT] and the ingredients list). Such knowledge will allow health professionals to help clients read nutrition labels, like that which is illustrated in **Figure 2.1**, and to make informed choices about healthy and safe eating that meets the dietary needs of each individual.



**Figure 2.1:** Reading nutrition labels

Health Canada is responsible for constructing policies to meet the standards set by the Food and Drugs Act (FDA). The Food Directorate of Health Canada is responsible for the “development of policies, regulations and standards that relate to the use of health claims on food” (Government of Canada, 2016, 3rd para). Other governing bodies, such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), have responsibilities for administering and enforcing food labelling policies as well as managing the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act. Under this legislation, food producers must meet governmental labelling requirements.

Most prepackaged food labels (e.g., can of soup, bag of chips, bag of frozen peas) must include the NFT, a list of ingredients, allergen statements, and best before dates. The NFT is mandatory on prepackaged foods with the exception of some items such as alcoholic beverages and products that have few nutrients (e.g., coffee and spices). The Government of Canada (2019a) does not require nutritional labelling on foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables and foods sold at farmers’ markets. In general, it is mandatory to show both official languages of Canada (French and English) on labels, with some exceptions (e.g., specialty foods, local foods, test market foods, and shipping containers) as long as the products are not resold to consumers.

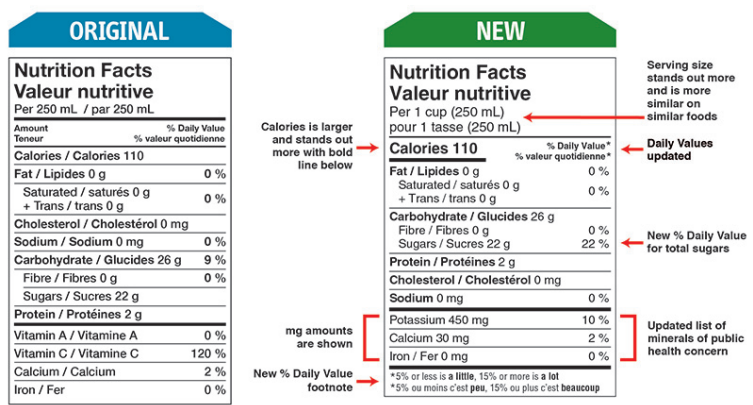
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# The Nutrition Facts Table and Ingredient List

Under Government of Canada (2019a) regulations, the NFT must provide information about serving size, calories, **percent daily value (% DV) of nutrients**, and core nutrients. Currently, the requirements for nutrient information are changing and industry has five years to make changes so that NFT include: fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrate, fibre, sugars, protein, potassium, calcium, and iron (Government of Canada, 2019a; Government of Canada, 2017). **Figure 2.2** illustrates the new NFT as compared with the original (i.e., the previous version).

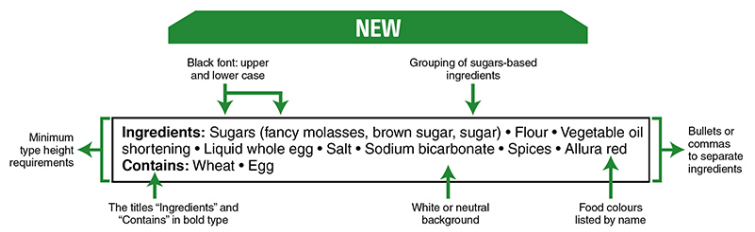


**Figure 2.2:** Comparison of the original NFT and the new NFT

The NFT displays the % DV so consumers can determine the amount of a certain nutrient in one serving. For example, the Government of Canada (2019b) indicates that 5% of the DV or less of a nutrient is considered “a little” while 15% of the DV or more of a nutrient is

considered “a lot.” You should be aware that the % DV is not used to identify whether a person has had sufficient nutrients in a day, particularly considering that many foods do not require the NFT (Government of Canada, 2019b). Rather, it is best to talk with your clients about using the % DV to compare and make choices between different types of food that are higher in healthy nutrients (e.g., fibre) and lower in nutrients that are not healthy (e.g., sodium and trans fat) (Government of Canada, 2019b).

The list of ingredients (as illustrated in **Figure 2.3**) is mandatory on most packaged foods that contain more than one ingredient, and ingredients are listed in order of weight. The weight of ingredients listed will be an important aspect of your conversation with a client. You may choose to draw their attention to that aspect of food labelling and discuss with them how it might impact their food choices. In addition, caffeinated energy drinks require that the amount of caffeine is included with a statement that the product is a “high source of caffeine” and “not recommended for children, pregnant/breastfeeding women” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2015).



**Figure 2.3:** List of ingredients

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# Allergens

Where needed, food labels may also include an “Allergen Declarations and Gluten Sources” statement which captures the **top ten priority food allergens**. The ten priority allergens are set by Health Canada and include egg, soy, sesame seeds, milk, seafood, tree nuts (including peanuts as per **Figure 2.4**), sulphites, wheat, and mustard. If any of these priority food allergens are present, they must be listed in the ingredients and/or in a statement that begins with “contains” or “may contain” on a food product label.



**Figure 2.4:** Food allergies include peanut allergies. Graphic created with peanut icon by Tomas Knopp and circle icon by Pur Seven from the Noun Project

It is prudent for any consumer, particularly people with food allergies or those who are purchasing or preparing food for people

with allergies, to read food labels. It is important to note that companies can change ingredients without telling consumers; therefore, the responsibility to read labels remains with the consumer. When clients have an allergy, it is meaningful to discuss the importance of letting the host of a social gathering know ahead of time and always talking with the seller or producer of food at farmer's markets and restaurants.

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# Best Before and Expiry Dates

The **best before** date (or meilleur avant) as illustrated in **Figure 2.5** indicates the anticipated amount of time an unopened food product keeps its freshness, taste, nutritional value, or any other qualities claimed by the company, when stored properly. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2018) indicates that unopened products “should be of high quality until the specified date.” As soon as the product is opened, the best before date no longer applies. The best before date must appear on packaged foods that have a shelf life of 90 days or less such as milk, yogurt, and bread. Products still can be purchased or eaten after best before dates as these dates are not related to product safety.



**Figure 2.5:** Best before dates

Packaged foods that show an **expiration date** (as illustrated in **Figure 2.6**) must be consumed before that date or discarded after the expiry date. The expiry date must not be mistaken for the best before date. Expiration dates are not required on all foods. The

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2018) indicates that foods that have “strict compositional and nutritional specifications” must have expiry dates (e.g., infant formula, meal replacements, nutritional supplements, formulated liquid diets for oral and tube feeding).



**Figure 2.6:** Expiration dates

Expiration dates and best before dates rely on a consumer’s ability to follow instructions concerning proper food storage. You may need to reinforce with clients the importance of keeping “cold food cold and hot food hot” so that bacteria do not grow (Government of Canada, 2014). The Government of Canada (2014) indicates that refrigerator temperatures should be kept at +4° Celsius and freezer temperatures are to be kept at -18° Celsius. Further information about refrigeration and freezer times for safety and quality can be viewed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-food-storage.html>

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# Country of Origin

Many of the food products sold and consumed in Canada are produced around the world, which is illustrated in **Figure 2.7**.



**Figure 2.7:** Food sold and consumed in Canada from around the world.  
Graphic created with icons from the Food Line Icons by Vector Market from the Noun Project and Globe Icon by randomhero from the Noun Project

If a food product is imported from another country, its **country of origin** must be on the label. See **Film Clip 2.1** of Dr. Lisa Seto Nielsen, a registered nurse, speaking about assumptions concerning food that is produced outside of Canada.



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**Film Clip 2.1:** Dr. Lisa Seto Nielsen speaking about assumptions concerning food that is produced outside of Canada

If products are produced in Canada, they must include the name and address of the responsible company. Food products that say “Product of Canada” must follow specific guidelines. For example, a Product of Canada item must have most (generally 98%) of its food, processes, and labour originating in Canada. This means that Product of Canada foods were grown or raised by Canadian farmers and are prepared and packaged by Canadian food companies.

The claim “Made in Canada” means that the manufacturing or processing of the food occurred in Canada. A claim can be made on a label if the last substantial step in processing a product occurred in Canada, regardless of whether the ingredients are domestic or imported. For example, the processing of cheese, dough, sauce, and other ingredients to create a pizza would be considered a substantial step. If the food product contains some food grown by Canadian farmers, it can use the claim “Made in Canada” with domestic and imported ingredients. If all of the ingredients have been imported, it can use the claim “Made in Canada” from imported ingredients.

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# Critical Considerations

Part of the health professional's role is to help clients navigate and understand food nutrition tables. See **Table 2.1** about important items to consider.

Item to Consider	Comment
Consider the location of the NFT.	<p>The NFT often appears on the back or side of food packages and may be difficult to find or access. Groups, such as the Dietitians of Canada (2018), are asking Health Canada to move the NFT to the front of package since it is an important factor in how consumers make healthy food choices.</p>
Consider the meaning of serving size.	<p>The serving size on NFT is not always the recommended quantity of food that a person should eat (Government of Canada, 2019c). The serving size only indicates the amount of food used to calculate the numbers for the NFT (Government of Canada, 2019c). In addition, serving sizes may not be consistent across similar foods, making comparisons difficult. Health Canada is working to make serving sizes on NFT more consistent for easier comparison with alike foods and making them realistically reflect the amount of food that Canadians would typically eat (Government of Canada, 2017).</p>
Consider what is missing from the NFT.	<p>The NFT does not list all nutrients. For example, there is an effort underway to mandate the inclusion of potassium, calcium, and iron in the NFT because most Canadians do not consume sufficient amounts of these nutrients, which are important to health (Government of Canada, 2017).</p>



NFT are useful to make healthier food choices and build an awareness of what is in the food we consume. However, Campos, Doxey, and Hammond (2011) found variability in the use of the NFT in different groups including:

Consider who uses NFT.

- Higher use of NFT among people who have special dietary requirements due to certain health conditions.
- Higher use of NFT among Caucasian people.
- Lower use of NFT among children, older adults, and those with low socio-economic status.

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**Table 2.1:** NFT items to consider

# Reflective Questions

1. What must be included in the nutrition facts table?
2. What facilitates or hinders the use of nutrition facts tables?

# Evaluate Your Learning



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<https://pressbooks.nsc.ca/foodlabel/?p=81#h5p-5>

# Key Takeaways

Health professionals play an integral role in helping and empowering clients to better understand nutrition labelling and incorporate it into healthy eating patterns and food choices. As a health professional, it is important that you:

- Understand the legal requirements of nutrition labelling so that you can have informed discussions with clients and advocate when companies do not follow policies.
- Collaborate with clients on identifying and responding to their goals related to NFT, ingredients lists, and other nutrition labelling.

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# Glossary

## **24-hour food recall**

A list of all foods and beverages consumed in the last 24 hours.

## **autonomy**

A person's self-determination.

## **best before**

Anticipated amount of time an unopened food product keeps its freshness, taste, nutritional value, or any other qualities claimed by the company, when stored properly.

## **entry-to-practice competency**

Competencies expected upon graduation and entry into practice and registration with the College of Nurses.

## **evidence-informed healthcare and decision making**

The combination of current and rigorous evidence with social context to inform healthcare and decision making.

## **expiration date**

The date in which a food product should be consumed or discarded.

## **inequities**

Avoidable, unfair and unjust access to and distribution of resources.

**medicalized**

A focus on physical and biological problems.

**nutrition facts tables**

Information on nutrition labels about serving size, calories, nutrients, and the percent daily value of nutrients.

**nutrition labelling**

Information included on labels of packaged foods about nutrient content.

**percent daily value (% DV) of nutrients**

The amount of a certain nutrient in one serving.

**positionality**

A person's stance or position related to their beliefs and values.

**primary care**

Intervening by preventing a disease or health problem before it arises.

**reflexively**

In the context of nursing, it involves examining the interplay between your positionality, thinking and actions, and how this influences you and the client.

**relational approach**

Assuming each person is a relational being who is influenced by those around them, their communities, and social and cultural processes.



**relational inquiry**

Assuming each person is a relational being who is influenced by those around them, their communities, and social and cultural processes.

**secondary care**

Reducing the potential impact of a disease or health problem with screening, early detection, and intervention in the earliest phases.

**social determinants of health**

A range of factors (e.g., personal, socio-economic, environmental) that influence health and illness.

**social justice advocate**

Someone who advocates for fair and just policies.

**societal norms**

What are collectively defined as acceptable and un-acceptable ways of being informed by societal values and beliefs; these norms can be implicit or explicit.

**subjective assessment**

An assessment that focuses on information that the client shares with you.

**tertiary care**

Reducing the impact of an ongoing or chronic disease or health problem.

**unconditional positive regard**

Accepting the client, respecting their right to self-

determination, and supporting them regardless of your perception of what they say or do.

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