



STEP BY STEP FOR SAFER FOOD AND HEALTHY EATING

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READ THE LABEL CAREFULLY

Food labels help consumers to know more about the food they eat. Food regulations in all countries in the region required specific information on food labels. Some of this information is compulsory, some is optional.

NAME OF THE FOOD

The name of a food is called the (statement of identity). It is usually written in English if the food is imported, although local language versions may accompany it. A brand name can serve as the name of the food if the name is commonly used and understood by the public to refer to a specific food.

NET WEIGHT

Net weight or quantity refers only to the weight of food (including any liquid or juice usually eaten in which the food may be packed in a package or container). It does not include the weight of the container or wrappers. It is mostly stated in metric or pound units.

The net weight helps consumers in two ways: first, it lets consumers know how much food is in a container, and second, it aids in price comparison.

INGREDIENTS

An ingredient lists is required on all packaged foods composed of two or more ingredients, even standardized

foods. Ingredients must be listed in descending order by weight. This gives consumers an idea of the proportion of an ingredient in a food.

The ingredient list helps consumers identify foods that have substances they are allergic to or want to avoid for other reasons. It also helps them select foods with ingredients they want.

PRODUCTION AND EXPIRY DATES

Production date is the date the food was packaged or processed. It may enable consumers to determine how old a product is. Expiry date is the last day on which a product should be eaten. It is compulsory in all countries in the region. Sometimes it is written as “use-by” or “sell-by”.

For perishable foods such as milk and dairy products, frozen or chilled meat, poultry and fish, the expiry date is written in day/ month/ year. Some countries mention the month, then the day, followed by the year. Therefore, consumers should read the expiry date carefully.

COMPANY NAME

A food label must identify the firm responsible for the product (either the manufacturer, packer or distributor), and the firm's city, country and zip code (or other mailing code if the product is imported). This information is important so that consumers have a point of contact if they find something wrong with the product.

STORAGE INFORMATION

Storage information is usually required for perishable foods especially milk, chilled and frozen as well as infant formula. This information is sometimes given for the food before opening, or after opening, or for both.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Nutrition information or facts are optional in the countries of the region. However, many imported food products have nutrition facts on their labels. Nutrients are provided as percent daily values (DV) which is based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

HEALTH CLAIMS

Health claims are not compulsory, but the trend of mentioning health claims is increasing remarkably in food products. Some western countries allow manufacturers to make certain claims linking the effect of a nutrient or food to a disease or health related condition. Only claims supported by scientific evidence should be allowed, and they can be used only under certain condition, such as when the food is an adequate source of the appropriate nutrients.

FORTIFIED FOODS

Food fortification refers to the addition of essential nutrients to foods either to replace losses that occur during processing or to provide levels higher than those normally found in food. Common examples of fortified foods are

the addition of vitamin B and iron to wheat flour, vitamins A and D to dried milk and vitamin C to fruit juice. Nutrients added to food are mentioned on the label.

FOOD ADDITIVES

Food additives are natural or artificially produced substances which may be added to food in small amounts to perform special functions. The main reason for the use of additives in our food is to keep it fresh and consistent in quality. Most food labels must list all additives along with other ingredients. Some have (E) numbers, meaning that they have been accepted throughout the European community. Some are listed by name only. Food labels make it possible to avoid particular additives that may cause an allergic reaction or that you wish to avoid for any reason.

RELIGIOUS INFORMATION

Religious information is optional on the food label. However, it is mentioned in many food products. The word (Halal) usually means that the food is slaughtered according to Islamic Regulations and this is especially for meat and poultry, or it means that the food contains no pork derivatives.

SAFE FOOD CHOICES

The range of fresh frozen and canned foods available in the market is staggering. In addition, several changes happen to your food between the time it is harvested or when the animal is killed and when it ends up on your plate. Following are suggestions on choosing food so that you can eat it at its best, when it has the most nutritional content or food value.

CHOOSING FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

- Choose firm, bright, crisp produce. Old fruit looks dull, while old green vegetables are limp and yellow.
- Buy these foods in small quantities and eat them soon afterwards.
- Fruit and vegetables are best and cheapest in season. Out of season, they may not taste so good as they have been grown in artificial conditions or been imported.

CHOOSING MILK AND DAIRY PRODUCTS

- Only buy milk and dairy products from shops with spotlessly clean refrigerators.
- Check the expiration dates or “sell-by” or “use-by” dates on all milk and dairy products.
- Beware of dairy products stacked high in overcrowded refrigerator cases. Milk, cream, butter, and other dairy products all need to be surrounded with cold circulating air.

CHOOSING EGGS

- Never buy eggs which have been stored in a warm place. They become stale within five days when warm.
- Shell colour-brown, white or cream does not affect flavour or nutritive value. The only difference is that they are produced by different breeds of hen.
- Check eggs are not cracked. Never buy one with hairline cracks or breaks of any kind in the shell.
- Buy only eggs with clean shells.

CHOOSING MEAT AND FISH

- Do not buy meat or fish from a shop that is not clean.
- Fresh meat is springy to the touch, moist, well coloured and nearly odour free. Sure signs of spoilage are: drying at the edges, darkened, mottled patches, brown or dull gray colour or strong odour.
- Fresh poultry should be cleanly dressed, with no feathers, no bruises, and no broken skin. It should have a fresh aroma. Because of an increased risk of food poisoning, do not buy whole birds already stuffed for roasting.
- Frozen poultry should be rock hard and stored well below the frost line on the freezer case.
- Examine the package of frozen poultry; frozen liquid inside is sign that the bird has been thawed and refrozen; heavy frost means it has been stored too long.
- Do not choose a frozen bird with powdery, discolored patches on the skin.

- Choose fish with firm moist flesh, the eyes should be clear and not sunken, the gills bright red and a good smell. A strong fishy odour means the fish is no longer fresh.

FOOD STORAGE

Dry Foods

- All food storage areas should be clean, dry, well lit, ventilated, easily accessible and pest proof.
- Foods should always be stored off the floor.
- Always operate strict stock rotation procedures. The rule is first in, first out.
- Date marking of food gives an indication of the shelf life. "Use-by" dates are marked on highly perishable foods and these foods must never be used after the date indicated. "Best before" dates are marked on longer life foods and advise maximum shelf life.
- Blown or damaged packaging may indicate that the food has become contaminated. Make sure such packs are disposed of.
- Keep strongly perfumed goods, like soap powders, away from food. Always store raw foods separately from cooked foods. Cleaning materials should never be stored with food, but should be contained, labeled and kept in a separate, dedicated area.

Food in the Refrigerator

- Meat, poultry and fish stay freshest in the coldest part of the refrigerator, especially where air circulates freely. They should be loosely wrapped in plastic; usually the original packaging is adequate unless there is a great deal of blood.

- Eggs should be refrigerated in their original carton, with the larger end pointing up to keep the yolk centered. Although most refrigerators have an egg rack on the door, it is best to store eggs away from the door where the temperature is more constant.
- Some vitamin content of fresh fruit and vegetables is diminished if produce is kept at normal room temperature. The vegetables crisper, that is the drawer in the bottom of the refrigerator, keeping vegetables fresh for several days, because it closes the produce off from circulating air that draws up moisture. Crispers are most effective when they are at least two-thirds full.
- Fruit and vegetables stored in the refrigerator should be kept in unsealed plastic bags.
- Fruit and tomatoes ripen best at room temperature; when they are fully ripe, they should be refrigerated.

Frozen Foods

- To freeze food successfully; seal the food in airtight packages, label the package so you can find and use the food within its recommended storage time, and freeze the food quickly.
- Only glass and plastic containers designed for the freezer and so labeled should be used. Plastic bags and plastic wraps are effective only if their labels specify that they can be used in the freezer.
- A certain amount of air space is necessary, when you are freezing liquids, fruit and vegetables. These foods expand as they freeze and need a little room to do it in.

- Every package of food you freeze needs a label with a description of the contents, the date frozen, and a “use-by” date.
- Food should be no warmer than room temperature when it goes into the freezer. Refrigerate hot foods before you freeze them.
- Package food in the smallest quantities that are practical for your purposes. Small packages freeze faster than large ones.
- Place packages to be frozen directly on the freezer surface, not on other frozen foods. Leave some space around new packages to allow air circulation.

SAFE HANDLING AND PREPARATION OF FOOD

Eating contaminated food can lead to serious illness. To prevent the risk of contamination with germs, always follow good hygienic practices:

- Never eat food which has passed its expiry date.
- Never blow into bags to open them for food packaging.
- Wash your hands with soap and hot water before and after touching food.
- Avoid touching your nose or coughing or sneezing over food.
- Keep your hair covered with a net or disposable hat and do not comb hair in a food area.
- Keep finger - nails short and clean and do not wear nail varnish.
- Avoid wearing hand / wrist jewellery, earrings, brooches or rings with stones.

- Keep cuts, grazes and boils covered with a water proof dressing.
- Wear clean protective over clothing.
- Do not smoke in a food area.
- It is better not to prepare food for others if you are sick.
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate, especially raw meat or poultry and cooked meat or poultry.
- Keep food at the correct temperature.
- Hot meals should be eaten hot and cold meals eaten cold.
- Cook food thoroughly so that the center is heated for a sufficient length of time.
- Following cooking, cool food quickly and refrigerate it, unless it is needed for current service.
- Avoid preparing food too far in advance or removing it from the refrigerator too early.
- Be sure that certain frozen food is thawed thoroughly before cooking, especially poultry and meat.
- Never re-freeze raw foods.
- Keep food covered whenever possible.
- Always ensure the workplace is clean before preparing food.
- Clean kitchen utensils and equipment thoroughly before and after use.
- Use clean wiping cloths.
- Keep insects, pests, animals, dust and smoke away from all foods.
- Wash food in clean water before eating or cooking.

GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHY EATING

1. Cut down the amount of fat you eat

Fat is an important part in our diet, giving calories for energy and providing some vitamins, but many of us eat too much fat. Reduction in consumption of fat (especially saturated fat) and cholesterol is highly recommended. Foods that are relatively low in these substances, such as vegetables, fruit, whole grain foods, fish, poultry, lean meat, and low-fat dairy products should be chosen. Food preparation methods that add little or no fat should be used.

2. Achieve and maintain a desirable body weight

This should be done by choosing a dietary pattern in which energy (caloric) intake is consistent with energy expenditure. In order to reduce energy intake, the consumption of foods containing fats and sugars that are relatively high in calories should be limited.

3. Increase intake of complex carbohydrates

Increase consumption of whole grain foods and cereal products at the expense of refined varieties. The consumption of vegetables, especially leafy green vegetables should also be increased. Maintain consumption of legume products such as chick peas, beans and lentils, and increase consumption of fruit, including local varieties.

4. Decrease intake of salt

Salt contains sodium and chlorine, both of which are essential nutrients. Excess salt can, however, be hazardous for those with, or at risk of, high blood pressure. Thus salt and salty foods should be taken in moderation. Many processed foods may contain high levels of sodium and the use of additional table salt should be minimized.

5. Increase intake of calcium-rich foods

Increased consumption of foods high in calcium is recommended for all but especially for adolescent girls and adult females. High calcium foods are mainly dairy products. Low fat dairy foods are advised when they are available.

6. Eat food rich in iron frequently

Children, adolescents and women of childbearing age are at high risk for iron deficiency anaemia. Foods that are sources of iron are lean red meat, organ meats, fish, beans, legumes, leafy vegetables and whole grain products. These foods should be consumed when available. This issue is of special concern for low-income families where anaemia can be common.

7. Decrease intake of sugars

Excessive sugar consumption with bad dental hygiene increases the risk of developing dental caries (cavities), especially in children. Sugar consumption is high for many in the Middle East region, thus reduction in the consumption and frequency of use of foods high in sugars is recommended.

8. Decrease intake of salty, smoked and pickled foods

Consumption of certain highly salted, pickled and smoked foods has been linked to an increased incidence of certain kinds of cancer. These foods should therefore only be consumed in moderation.

9. Increase physical activity

Exercise can help you relax and keep you fit. It is also an important factor to prevent some chronic diseases. To be beneficial, physical activity needs to increase the heart rate above the normal level. To achieve that you need to do 30 minutes of exercise most days of a week. Another way is to build on every day activities by doing them a bit more energetically, making muscles work a little more than usual.

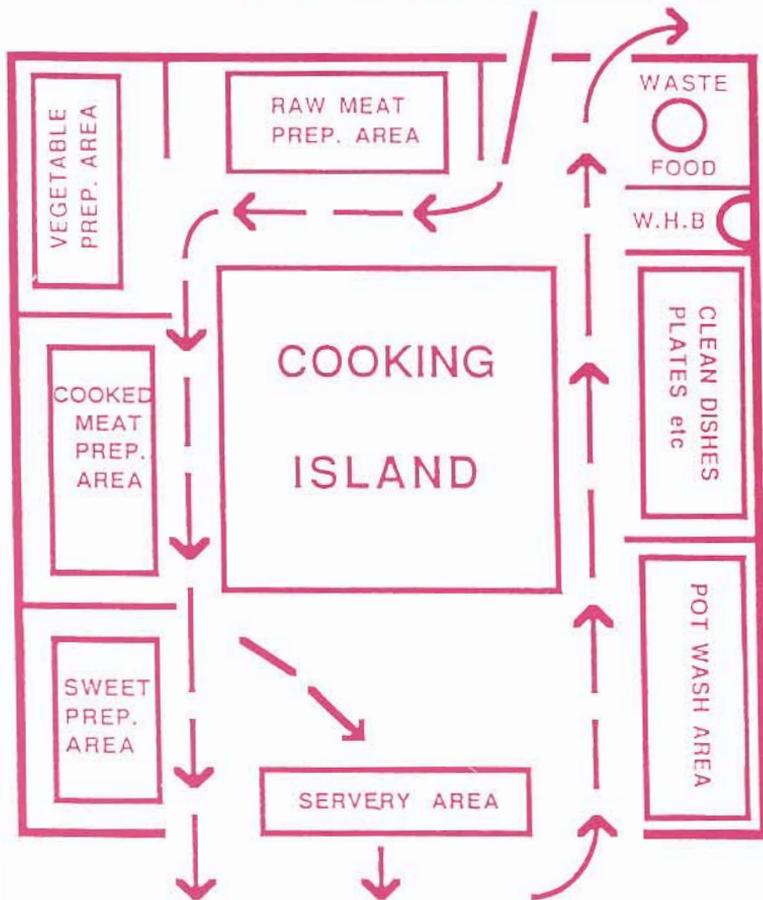
10. Stop smoking

If you are a smoker (either cigarettes or water-pipe) stop smoking now. Smoking is strongly linked to increased risk for both heart disease and for lung cancer and thus should be avoided.

11. Avoid drinking alcohol

Alcohol consumption increase the risk of certain types of cancer as well as heart disease. It is also prohibited in most countries of the region. Avoidance of alcoholic beverages is recommended.

EXAMPLE OF THE LAYOUT OF A HYGIENIC CATERING KITCHEN



SEPARATION OF 'CLEAN' and 'DIRTY' AREAS

This booklet

The short way for safe foods and healthy eating.

Main Contents

- **Read the label carefully**
- **Safe food choices**
- **Food storage**
- **Guidelines for healthy eating**

Arab Center for Nutrition

**Non-governmental foundation aims to promote
healthy nutrition in the Arab countries**



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