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WHAT'S IN STORE



You may enter the supermarket with good intentions but deciphering the nutrition information on products can bring any shopper undone, writes **Paula Goodyer**.

If your eyes glaze over in the cereal aisle, while you're trying to find the healthiest breakfast, you're not alone. Who hasn't been tempted by the promise of antioxidants and fibre, only to realise the fine print on the pack reveals it's loaded with sugar. And that's assuming you know what the numbers on the nutrition information panel mean – is 15g of sugar per 100g of muesli a little or a lot?

Welcome to 21st-century food shopping, where supermarkets offer thousands of products – and you've got a single hour a week to work out what's healthy.

'People struggle to understand the nutrition information panel because they have no benchmark for what's high or low.' SUE RADD, DIETITIAN

"People struggle to understand the nutrition information panel because they have no benchmark for what's high or low for ingredients like salt, fibre, saturated fat and sugar," says Sydney dietitian Sue Radd of the Nutrition and Wellbeing Clinic, one of many dietitians now running supermarket tours teaching consumers how to become savvier food shoppers. "Even if you understand the numbers, you run into another problem – what if you like a product for its fibre content, then realise it's high in salt? Do you compromise on the salt or try to find something better?"

Radd's healthy solution is simple: spend more time shopping on the supermarket's perimeter, where the fresh produce is stocked, and cook more meals from scratch. "[Cooking from scratch] gives you more control over what's in your food – you

don't have to make trade-offs with products that have less saturated fat but too much salt. When people see how easy it is to make their own pasta sauce, they're surprised – we've been conned into thinking we don't have enough time."

But back to the numbers. A healthy fibre content is 3g or more per 100g – 6g is even better, says Radd. A low-salt food has 120mg sodium per 100g or less; low-fat food has 3g or less per 100g.

"With some products you may need different criteria – it's hard to find low-salt bread so unless you have high blood pressure, settle for one that's less than

420mg sodium per 100g," she says. "With cheese, people think a low-fat label is a licence to eat as much as they want, but cheese hides a lot of salt. Look for products with 5g or less of fat and less than 350g sodium per 100g."

As for sugar in breakfast cereal, less than 15g sugar per 100g is good – but a higher sugar content is okay if the cereal contains a lot of dried fruit, she says.

And a healthier yoghurt? Flavoured yoghurts tend to be high in added sugar while diet yoghurts have artificial sweeteners. The best choice, says Radd, is natural yoghurt with your own added flavourings such as berries, cinnamon or grated ginger.

H&G

For advice on healthy shopping, go to the Dietitians' Association of Australia virtual supermarket; www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?pageID=2145858291.

SHOPPING TIPS

- ✦ Organic isn't another word for healthy – organic foods can be high in sugar or salt.
- ✦ Not all wholegrain breads are created equal. Wholemeal has all the nutrients of whole grains, but the flour is so finely milled it can have the same GI as white bread.
- ✦ Avoid impulse buying by taking a list and shopping only in aisles that have the products you need.

NOTE TO SELF

Look for *The Australian Women's Healthy Diary 2011*, a practical organiser that's filled with the latest information on wellbeing. Every purchase supports breast cancer research; \$15, with bonus pink pen. Available at newsagents, www.bcia.org.au or 1800 423 444.

