

Label reading for food allergies

Many packaged foods contain common food allergens that may not be obvious. Learning how to read food labels is important to ensure the foods you buy do not contain allergens.

It is important to always read food labels when buying packaged foods. Even if you have bought a food in the past and considered it 'safe', manufacturers can change ingredients, processes or production locations at any time and without warning.

Packaged products may be produced on the same production line as other foods.

This can result in trace amounts of allergens

crossing over to other foods. These trace amounts can still cause an allergic reaction.

Nutrition Information		
Servings per package: 1		
Serving size: 35g		
	Per Serve	Per 100g
Energy	501kJ	1430kJ
Protein	3.5g	10g
Fat	0.4g	1
Saturated	0.2g	0.5g
Carbohydrates		
Total	25.3g	72.2g
Sugar	7.5g	21.5g
Fibre	3.4g	9.7g
Sodium	185mg	535mg

Ingredients: Cereals (44%) (wheat flour, oatmeal, maize flour), sugar, wheat gluten, molasses, salt, barley malt extract, minerals (calcium carbonate, iron), mineral salt (sodium bicarbonate), natural colour (paprika, turmeric), vitamins (vitamin C, niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate).
Contains gluten containing cereals.
May contain traces of peanuts and/or tree nuts.

Labelling Laws in Australia

In Australia, the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is a government agency, which regulates food labels in Australia. See page 3 for an example of a biscuit food label. The Australian

standards and codes regarding food labelling for allergens include:

- **Mandatory labelling is required for all common food allergens** – these are peanuts, tree nuts, cow's milk, egg, soy, fish, shellfish, sesame and gluten (including the source of the gluten).
- No matter how small the amount is, these common food allergens must be declared on a label if they are included as an ingredient, part of a compound ingredient, a food additive or a processing aid.
- It is not mandatory to label for less common allergens such as rice, corn and potato.
- **It is not mandatory to use 'May contain...' statements to declare cross contamination risk in products.**
- **For Sulphites and Asthma:** as sulphites can cause asthma attacks in asthmatics, labels must identify if sulphite preservatives are present in the amount that can cause a reaction (≥ 10 milligrams per kilogram of food).
- **For Bee Products and Asthma:** foods and complementary medicines containing the bee product Royal Jelly

are required to have a warning statement declaring this included ingredient. This is because of the risk of severe allergic reactions especially in asthma and allergy sufferers.

- **For Coeliac Disease:** Gluten-containing cereals and ingredients made from gluten-containing cereals must be declared on food labels. This includes wheat, rye, barley, oats and hybrid strains of these cereals (e.g. triticale). If you have coeliac disease,



please refer to the NEMO Coeliac Disease Resource.

6 Tips for Allergen Label Reading

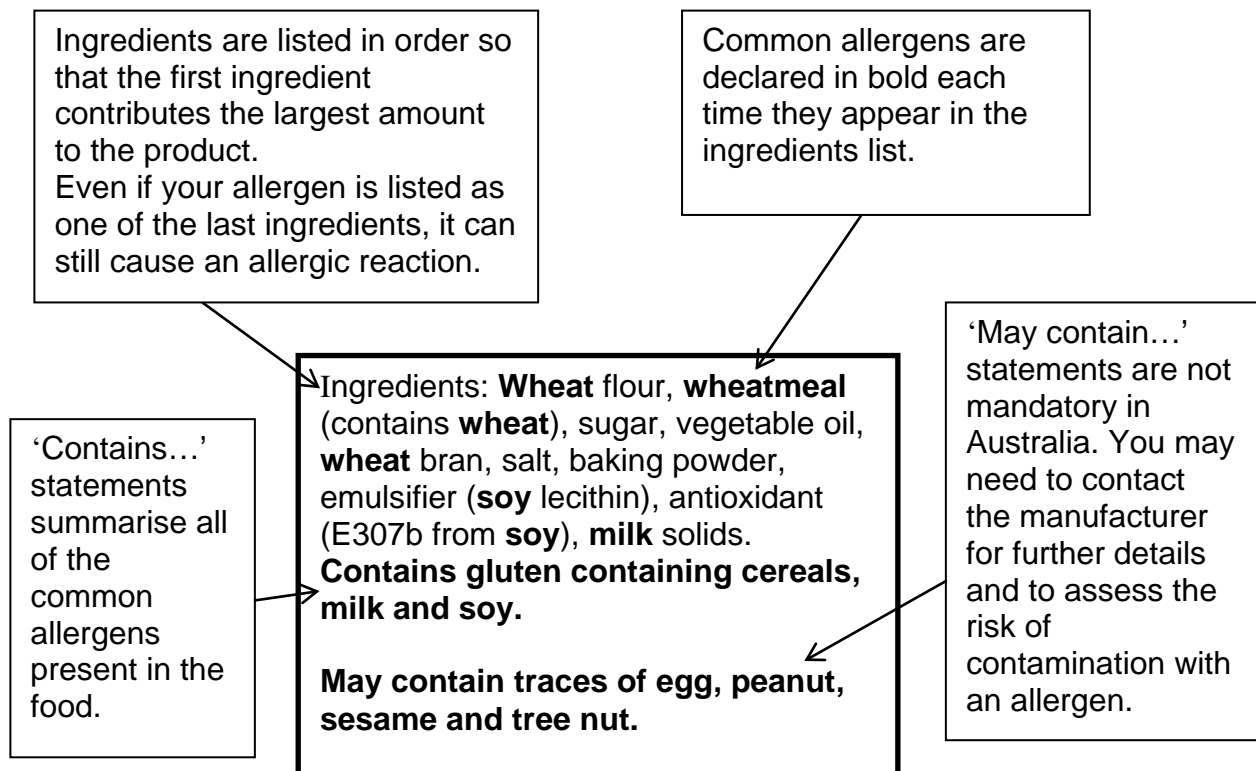
- 1) As 'may contain' statements are **not mandatory**, you should check with the manufacturer before consuming a product if there is a risk it might be contaminated with an allergen. This is also the case for individuals with less common allergies where labelling is not mandatory.
- 2) It is important to **check the food label every time you buy a product** even if it has previously been safe, as ingredients and processes can change without warning.

- 3) **Visually check** the food - even if you have read the food label - as mistakes can happen. For example, a bakery product may have been contaminated with sesame seeds or a pastry with a shiny finish has probably been glazed with milk or egg.
- 4) Children with allergies **should always have adult supervision** when buying foods.
- 5) Foods consumed outside the home (for example, at restaurants or a friend's house) carry a higher risk for cross-contamination of allergens. Use the NEMO resource on eating out with an allergy to help when eating foods outside the home.
- 6) Some products are not legally required to have food labels. These foods are considered high risk for people with allergies. Although these foods do not have labels, the food provider **must be able to provide information** regarding the food's ingredients and risk of cross-contamination. It is recommended to talk with your GP, Dietitian or allergy specialist regarding your management of these foods.

Label Reading Guide

All packaged foods sold in Australia must provide a list of ingredients. This list will identify all ingredients, the source of the ingredient (if it is from a common food allergy), warning statements and 'may contain' statements.

Example ingredients list for a biscuit product



Where can I go for further information?

1. **FSANZ** (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand): www.foodstandards.gov.au
2. **ASCIA** (The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy): www.allergy.org.au/
3. **Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia:** www.allergyfacts.org.au

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____