



UNDERSTANDING THE LABELLING OF CHEESE

Food labelling is often confusing. This leaflet aims to explain the meaning of the most commonly used terms on packs of cheese.



Name of Cheese

Usually the biggest name on pack either refers to the brand of cheese (e.g. Cathedral City or Pilgrims Choice) or the name of the cheese (e.g. Cheddar, Cheshire, Brie, Stilton). The name of the cheese broadly describes the recipe used to make the cheese. In some cases the name will also be protected (e.g. Blue Stilton, West Country Farmhouse Cheddar) meaning that it is a traditional product associated with a particular region. It will have been produced to a very precise recipe, using local milk and can only be produced in the defined region. The initials 'PDO' (Protected Designation of Origin) or 'PGI' (Protected Geographical Indication) may also be used to indicate that the cheese is a protected name.



Flavour Strength

Cheddar and other hard cheeses can be produced in different flavour strengths depending on how long they have been matured. Different names have been developed to describe the flavour strength as follows:

mild - medium - mature - extra mature - vintage

Each step represents a more mature and flavoursome cheese. Some supermarkets use a strength numbering system where 1 is very mild and 5 is very strong. However, each supermarket has its own system and as such, the numbers may carry slightly different meanings between outlets.

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Made from Unpasteurised or Raw Milk

Virtually all the cheese made in the UK is produced from milk which has been heated before use to kill off any harmful bacteria. A small amount of farmhouse cheese is still made from raw milk (i.e. untreated milk) and it will be clearly labelled. Pregnant women are advised not to eat raw milk cheese.



Organic

This simply means that the cheese has been made from organically produced milk.



Suitable for Vegetarians

This means that the cheese has been made using a non-animal rennet. Rennet is the setting (or coagulating) agent used to make cheese. Traditionally this was derived from an animal source and as such cheese made in this way was not suitable for vegetarians. Most cheese made in the UK now uses non-animal rennet and is therefore suitable for vegetarians - even if it does not say so on the label. The exceptions are some traditional cheeses like unpasteurised farmhouse cheeses and in these cases the label may well indicate that animal rennet has been used.



Fat Content

Different types of cheese are often available in varying fat contents with a whole host of terms being used to describe the fat level.

- **Full fat** - made from whole milk with none of the cream removed. Cheddar is a full fat cheese and typically has 34% to 35% fat.
- **Reduced fat** - 25% less fat than its full fat equivalent. Some of the cream is removed from the milk before it is made into cheese. A reduced fat cheese like Cheddar would have about 26% fat.





Fat Content cont.

- **Half fat** - Exactly what it says on the label - half the cream has been removed from the milk and a half fat cheese like Cheddar would have a fat content of around 17% to 18%.
- **Low fat** - By law any low fat food must have a fat content of less than 3%.
- **Very low fat** - Any very low fat food will have a fat content of less than 1%.
- **Fat free** - Not entirely fat free - but almost - at less than 0.15% fat.



Nutritional Labelling

It is not compulsory to put nutritional labelling onto cheese but virtually all cheeses do carry it. If it is used then it must contain at a minimum information on the 'Big 4' nutrients - energy, fat, carbohydrate and protein. In some cases the sodium content is also given. More detailed information can be given on the types of fat and the types of carbohydrate. The information is provided either in terms of nutrients per 100g and/or nutrients per serving or for a weight other than 100g.

- **Energy** - expressed in kilojoules (kj) and calories (kcal) per 100g of cheese.
- **Carbohydrate** - expressed as an amount per 100g of cheese - sometimes broken down further with the inclusion of a separate line 'of which: sugars'. Most cheeses contain very little carbohydrate. Any carbohydrate in natural cheese (excluding cheeses blended with fruits) comes from the milk sugar or lactose and most of this is removed with the whey as part of the cheesemaking process. Most hard cheeses, such as Cheddar, contain as little as 0.1 grams of carbohydrate per 100 grams and to all intents and purposes are carbohydrate and lactose free. Soft and some processed cheeses may contain slightly more.
- **Protein** - expressed as an amount per 100g of cheese.
- **Fat** - expressed as an amount per 100g of cheese. Sometimes further information is given on saturated fat, monounsaturated fat and polyunsaturated fat.
- **Sodium** - expressed as an amount per 100g of cheese. The sodium content multiplied by 2.5 gives you the salt content. So a cheese with 1 gram of sodium per 100g of cheese contains 2.5 grams of salt per 100g of cheese (or 2.5%).





Guideline Daily Amounts

Some labels also show Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) for key nutrients - typically calories, fat, saturated fat, protein, carbohydrate (sugars) and salt (sodium). GDAs were first adopted by the Institute of Grocery Distribution and then by retailers and some manufacturers. GDAs will vary according to sex and age. For men the GDA for energy (calories) is 2500 calories (kcal) per day whilst for women it is 2000 calories (kcal) per day. GDAs may be presented in different ways but essentially they should enable you to understand what a portion of that particular food will contribute to your diet. Thus a 30g serving of Cheddar will provide the following amounts of calories, fat and salt which in turn represent a certain proportion of the GDA for a man:

	30g of Cheddar	Male GDA	% of GDA
Calories	125	2500	5.0
Fat	10.5	95	11.7
Salt	0.54	6.0	9.0

In some cases 'traffic light labelling' is used to show whether a food is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in any given nutrient.

Cheese is a concentrated form of milk and apart from containing calories, fat and salt it is also a source of protein, calcium, phosphorus and Vitamin B12.

British Cheese - yes please!

The British Cheese Board aims to increase consumption of cheese made by its members and provides information about cheese as part of a balanced diet.

What are the benefits of eating cheese?

- Hard cheese contains essential nutrients - protein, calcium, phosphorus and vitamin B12
- It is versatile and convenient to use as part of any meal occasion
- There are more than 700 named cheeses now produced in the UK alone

The British Cheese Board was formed in 1997 and its members account for the majority of cheese made in the UK.



For further information on the British Cheese Board and its members and the cheeses they produce go to www.britishcheese.com or e-mail us at enquiries@britishcheese.com

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