Understanding food labels

**Nutrition**
Key message: Explain the role of different foods in a healthy, varied diet.

**Objective**
Interpret nutrition information on packaging, e.g. nutrition panels, ingredients lists

**Resources**
- 16 x labelled products or clean, empty product packages (with ingredient and nutrition labels). The products/packages need to be safe and suitable for the children to handle. Eight packages should be from wheat-based products and eight from non-wheat based products. Examples are as follows:
  - Wheat-based products: wholemeal bread, white bread, crumpets, crackers, scones, bran flakes, gnocchi, wheat biscuits (breakfast cereal).
  - Non-wheat-based products: natural yogurt, cheese, canned tuna, can of tomato soup, carton of milk, a tub of spread, corn flakes, white rice.
- Comparing food labels worksheet

**Introduction**
Show children the selection of products/product packages. Talk about the packaging.
- Which packaging do you like? Why?
- What is on the packaging?
- What do food labels tell us?
- Do you look at food labels?

Hand out the products/product packaging so each pair has one to share. Ask them to look at the ingredients, ask some of them to name the first one or two ingredients in their food. Explain that the largest amount of the ingredients is listed first in products.

Ask the children to look at the back of pack nutrition information. Question them:
What can you see listed? (e.g. energy, fat, carbohydrate)
What quantities are given? (per 100g and sometimes per item or portion too)
Why does it always give the quantities per 100g? (This is so products can be compared in equal quantities.)

Explain to the children that they are going to do an activity to explore the different foods or food packages in the room in more detail.
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Activity

- Distribute the products/product packaging around the room. Explain to the children that they are going to choose three wheat-based products and three non-wheat based products and record the first/main ingredient (they can record the second one too if you wish), the energy (measured in kilojoules (kJ), carbohydrate (total) and fibre provided by 100g of each product. Make sure you check all the product labels yourself before the lesson so you can be prepared to deal with any arising queries. The children can use the Comparing food labels worksheet to record their findings.

When the children have completed the activity, ask them to share some facts they have noticed. Question them:
- Which foods had the most carbohydrate?
- Which foods had the most fibre?
- Which foods had the most energy?
- Can you make a statement about what you might expect to find on the label of a wheat-based product?
- Were you surprised by the first/main ingredients listed in any of the products? Why?

Ask the children for some examples of the figures for 100g and per portion (where given) of the different products. Discuss with the children how the figures change and why. (A portion may weigh more or less than 100g.)

Round up

Recap the learning by questioning the children:
- What information can be found on food labels?
- How does the information on food labels help us?
- Why is the information given for 100g and often a portion as well?

Extension ideas

- Task the children to collect information from products at home using the Comparing food labels worksheet.
- Task the children to design a label for a product. They could use Explore food, a free nutritional analysis tool, to do an analysis of their product or create a nutrition label.

Fun fact

The ingredients listed on packaging appear in weight order from the largest to smallest amount.