



# 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'. Hard cheese is, to all intents and purposes, carbohydrate free as all of the milk sugar (lactose) has been removed in the cheesemaking. Hard cheese is therefore lactose free. Even soft cheeses have only tiny amounts of lactose.
- **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). The GDA for any nutrient has been calculated by government nutritionists and 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, colour coding will be used to show whether a food is a high (red), medium (amber) or a low (green) source of a given nutrient.

Cheese being a concentrated form of milk is nutrient dense and apart from being a good source of calories, fat and salt is also an excellent source of high quality protein, the A, B and D vitamins and calcium and other essential minerals. For further information see the British Cheese Board leaflet 'Cheese as part of a healthy balanced diet'.

## British Cheese - Instant Goodness

The British Cheese Board aims to increase consumption of cheese in the UK - particularly cheese produced by its members - by promoting the health benefits of eating cheese.

*What are the benefits of eating cheese?*

- It is one of nature's most complete foods • It contains essential nutrients - protein, vitamins, calcium and other minerals
- It is a natural food source • It is versatile

There are over 700 varieties of British cheese available.

The British Cheese Board was formed in 1996 and its members account for a significant proportion of cheese produced in the UK.



For further information on the British Cheese Board please visit [www.britishcheese.com](http://www.britishcheese.com)  
or write to Dragon Court, 27 Macklin Street, London, WC2B 5LX

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