

business companion

trading standards law explained

Labelling of prepacked foods: ingredients list

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This guidance is for England and Wales

This guidance relates to prepacked food only.

'Prepacked food' is defined in Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 *on the provision of food information to consumers* as "... food and the packaging into which it was put before being offered for sale, whether such packaging encloses the food completely or only partially, but in any event in such a way that the contents cannot be altered without opening or changing the packaging ...".

The definition of prepacked does not cover food packed on the sales premises at the consumer's request; nor does it cover food that is sold from the premises on which it was packed or from a mobile stall or vehicle used by the packer (referred to as 'prepacked for direct sale'). For more information see '[Labelling of non-prepacked foods](#)' and '[Labelling of prepacked-for-direct-sale foods](#)'.

List of ingredients

Most prepacked foods will need an ingredients list.

The list needs to be headed by the word 'ingredients' followed by a list of all the ingredients in descending order by weight at the mixing bowl stage of production. This means that the list goes from those ingredients that weighed the most to those ingredients that weighed the least when they were included in the product. There are a few exceptions to this.

Herbs, spices, additives, sweeteners and any other ingredient that makes up less than 2% of the finished product can be placed at the end of the list.

Compound ingredients

Compound ingredients are ingredients that are made up of more than one ingredient. All the components of the compound ingredient must be declared in brackets immediately after the compound ingredient appears in the ingredients list; the list should be in descending order of weight - for example, Toad in the hole: 'Ingredients: Batter (Water, Wheat Flour, Whole Egg, Egg White, Rapeseed Oil, Skimmed Milk Powder, Salt, Emulsifier: Soya Lecithin)'.

Any additives that are in the compound ingredient should be presented at the end of the bracketed list rather than at the end of the main ingredients list.

Any compound ingredient with a composition controlled by legislation (chocolate, jam, honey, etc) that makes up less than 2% of the finished product does not need to be broken down into its components.

Water

If water makes up 5% or more of the finished product then you need to include it in the ingredients list.

This doesn't apply to water that is intended to be drained away (tuna in brine, for example) or if water has been used to rehydrate a dried or powdered ingredient.

Additives

Additives must be included in the ingredients list like any other ingredient. If an additive makes up more than 2% of the finished product it must be declared in descending weight order as above. For additives that make up less than 2% of the finished product it is best practice to group them all together at the end of the list.

Even though you may not knowingly use additives they may be present in the ingredients you are using. You should make a careful check of any packaging or documents that come with your ingredients and make sure that any additives they contain are declared.

Format of declared additives

You must declare the category of additive (what it does) followed by the name of the additive and/or the E number of the additive. You may use whichever method you prefer. For example:

- preservative: sorbic acid
- preservative: E200
- preservative: sorbic acid E200

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) website contains the list of [approved additives and E numbers](#).

If your product includes several additives from the same category you only need to state the category once and then list each additive from that category.

If an additive fits into multiple categories choose the main reason that you have included it and declare it as that category.

You may not consider some ingredients to be additives; however, if an ingredient has been included for a 'technological purpose' (that is to say, for what it does rather than how it tastes or the nutrients it provides) then you should declare it as an additive. For example, baking soda would be declared as 'Raising agent: sodium bicarbonate.'

If you are naming the additive rather than using its E number you must give the name in full, do not abbreviate - for example, 'monosodium glutamate' rather than 'MSG'.

Colours

Colours are a type of additive and follow the rules above. If you use certain colours in your food you need to include specific warnings.

For full details please see '[Colours in food](#)'.

Sweeteners

Sweeteners are a type of additive and follow the rules above. Please refer to the FSA's list of [approved additives and E numbers](#) for sweeteners that can be used in food (referred to as 'permitted sweeteners').

Aspartame

If aspartame is in the product you must state the following on the label: 'Contains a source of phenylalanine'.

If you have only declared the E number rather than the name 'aspartame' in the ingredients list you need the following statement rather than the one above: 'Contains aspartame (a source of phenylalanine)'.

Polyols

Polyols are a type of carbohydrate-based sugar-free sweetener. If your product is made up of more than 10% added polyols you must state: 'Excessive consumption may produce laxative effects'.

Sweeteners are included on the approved additives list under their name rather than their type; as such you will need to research whether the sweeteners you are using are polyols.

Foods that do not need an ingredients list

The following products do not need an ingredients list:

- fresh whole, unpeeled, fruit and vegetables (including potatoes)
- carbonated water (which states that it is carbonated)
- vinegar containing no added ingredients
- cheese, butter, fermented milk and cream with no added ingredients (other than the ones needed to make them, such as bacterial cultures, salt in the case of cheese, etc)

- foods that are made up of a single ingredient and the name of the ingredient is stated in the name of the food
- beverages with an alcoholic strength greater than 1.2%

Products that do not have an ingredients list must still highlight the presence of allergenic ingredients. For more information please see '[Food allergens and intolerance](#)'.

Further information

There are many requirements for prepacked food. Please see our other guides on the subject:

- '[Labelling of prepacked foods: general](#)'
- '[Labelling of prepacked foods: nutrition declaration](#)'
- '[Labelling of prepacked foods: product name](#)'
- '[Labelling of prepacked foods: QUID](#)'

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see '[Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties](#)'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: June 2022

Key legislation

[Food Safety Act 1990](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1332/2008 on food enzymes](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1333/2008 on food additives](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1334/2008 on flavourings and certain food ingredients with flavouring properties for use in and on foods](#)

[Regulation \(EU\) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers](#)

[Food Additives, Flavourings, Enzymes and Extraction Solvents \(England\) Regulations 2013](#)

[Food Additives, Flavourings, Enzymes and Extraction Solvents \(Wales\) Regulations 2013](#)

[Food Information Regulations 2014](#)

[Food Information \(Wales\) Regulations 2014](#)

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links often only shows the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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