

Understanding food labelling



By [Amanda Rogaly](#)

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South Africa has legislative framework that dictates that the label on a product must match its contents. The first rule all food companies have to follow is to ensure the product name is descriptive and is a true reflection of the content of the food. As an example, a cake cannot be described as strawberry cake if it contains flavouring but not actual strawberries. It would need to be labelled as strawberry-flavoured cake instead.



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Similarly, only authorised nutrient content claims may be made eg. low fat or high in protein. No claims are allowed to be made around antioxidants or that a food assists in reduction of disease risk.

There are other health considerations when reading food labels. While the fat and calorie content is important, other ingredients, such as sodium, can affect how healthy a product is. Food labels can sometimes be confusing, especially if the front of the product proclaims that it is low in sodium but the information on the label lists sodium in the top few rows of the nutritional value information. This means that sodium is one of the primary ingredients in the product, since the label has to reflect the weights of ingredients from the highest to the lowest, in order.

If an ingredient is highlighted either through the product name or through pictures, the percentage contained in the product must be declared in the ingredients list. Information on the major eight allergens must either be declared in the ingredients list or stated as 'contains' at the end of the ingredients list.

Sell by vs use by

Another vital detail on labels is the sell-by or use-by date, known as the durability date. Durability dates are the dates that detail when the product is no longer of a desired quality and/or safety. There has been much discussion on this of late, as durability dates are pushing up food wastage of perfectly edible food, as the product may still be safe for consumption, but just lost some crunch or flavour. However, products that can become unsafe from microbial contamination require a use-by date and not a best-before date, because a best-before date refers only to the shelf life of an unopened product. This is to protect the consumer.

These pointers are just a few of the things consumers can look out for, for South African labelling laws are comprehensive. For example, the legislation stipulates that the name and address of the manufacturer should be clearly visible and that the storage instructions must be for both before opening and after opening the product. They must be such not only that the product is safe for consumption at the end of shelf life, but also of the expected quality.

It is a demanding process to comply with these regulations and one applauds the local food producers that fulfil all the labelling requirements.

ABOUT AMANDA ROGALY

A seasoned and award winning entrepreneur who is currently the CEO and Founder of the largest and fastest growing parenting platforms in South Africa. Amanda is passionate about empowering parents, leveraging her own parenting journey to educate others and influence purchasing decisions. Amanda is an aggressive brand builder and is passionate about strategically growing brands to increase top and bottom-line results and has combined her communications excellence with FMCG brands.

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