



“Let food be thy medicine”... when possible.

Dear Member

We all know that age-old adage that what you put in is what you get out. This couldn't be more true about the food we eat and what it can do to our health. This month we'll explore what hidden foods can do to your body, why should you learn to read labels and give you tips on checking your glucose. Plus, we'll show you how to make the most of your doctor's visit. Healthy reading!

POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team

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FOOD LABELS: 5 IS YOUR FRIEND! KEEP THESE HANDY HINTS IN MIND WHEN READING FOOD LABELS

Packaged foods come with nutrition labels that give you vital information about your food. It's important to familiarise yourself with food labels and take responsibility for what you put into your body. The

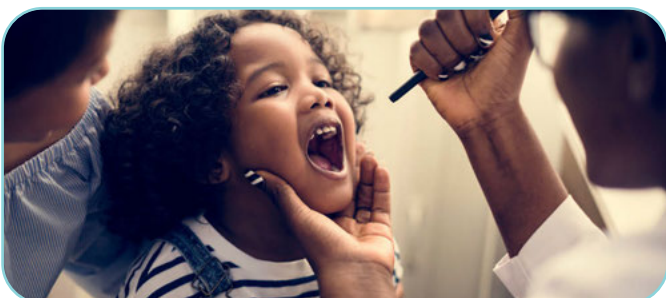


Nutrition	
Typical value	
Energy	
Energy	
Fat	
of which satu	

FOOD LABELS: 5 IS YOUR FRIEND

A simple way to help you read and interpret food labels quickly and easily – in this case 5 is the magic number.

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GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DOCTOR'S VISITS


Do you often walk away from your doctor's consult chiding yourself for the symptoms you didn't talk about or feel like you should've asked more questions? This quick guide will empower you to make the most of your time in their rooms.

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HbA1c TEST 101 STAY ON TOP OF YOUR GLUCOSE LEVELS

Managing diabetes can be challenging – keeping track of your blood sugar levels with the **HbA1c test** makes it easier!



WHAT IS IT?

hbA1c TEST

Everything you need to know about the hbA1c test and staying on top of your glucose levels.

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THE HIDDEN SALT THAT AFFECTS YOUR HEART

Excess doses of salt have been linked to hypertension. Here's some important advice on how to cut down and stay healthy.

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FOOD LABELS: 5 IS YOUR FRIEND! KEEP THESE HANDY HINTS IN MIND WHEN READING FOOD LABELS

Packaged foods come with nutrition labels that give you vital information about your food. It's important to familiarise yourself with food labels and take responsibility for what you put into your body. The **number 5** can greatly help you to make informed nutritional choices... here's how:



Typical nutritional value of a packet of potato chips

Nutritional Information	
Typical values	Per 100g
Energy	2203kj
Energy	527cal
Fat	35g
of which saturates	13.6g
Carbohydrate	46g
of which sugars	0.7g
Protein	7.4g
Dietary Fibre	4.8g
Salt	2g

THE POWER OF 5

When reading the 100g column, remember whether the number 5 is good or bad for you:



LESS THAN 5g

SUGAR
<5g

means low sugar content (good)

Low sugar content is good because too much sugar causes weight gain and increases your risk for diabetes.



SALT
5g

is the daily recommended amount

Exceeding the daily amount puts you at risk for high blood pressure. A higher blood pressure puts a greater strain on your heart.



GREATER THAN 5g

FIBRE
>5g

means high fibre content (good)

Fibre helps slow the rate that sugar is absorbed into your bloodstream.

This keeps your blood sugar levels from rising too quickly.




GREATER THAN 5g

FAT
>5g

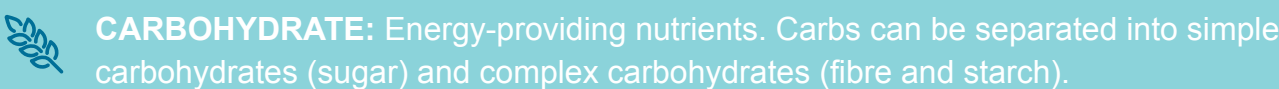
means high fat content (bad)

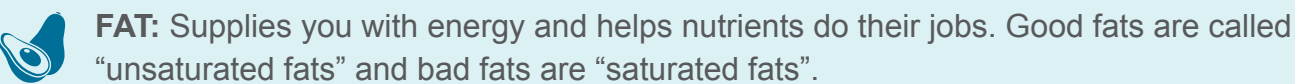
Aim for products with the lowest saturated fat content. High saturated fat can increase the bad cholesterol (LDL) in your blood and puts you at risk for heart disease.

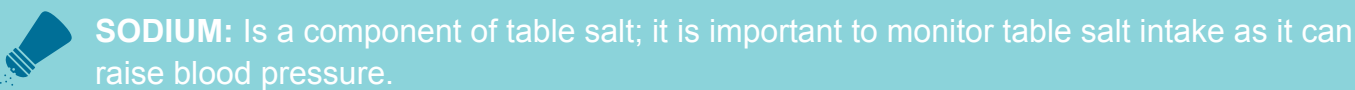
GOOD TO KNOW

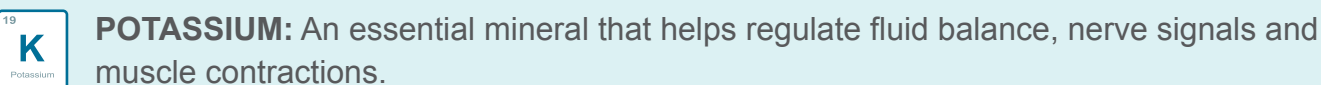
 **CALORIES OR KILOJOULES:** Provides a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of a specific food.

 **PROTEIN:** Is one of the three nutrients used as energy sources (calories) by the body.

 **CARBOHYDRATE:** Energy-providing nutrients. Carbs can be separated into simple carbohydrates (sugar) and complex carbohydrates (fibre and starch).

 **FAT:** Supplies you with energy and helps nutrients do their jobs. Good fats are called "unsaturated fats" and bad fats are "saturated fats".

 **SODIUM:** Is a component of table salt; it is important to monitor table salt intake as it can raise blood pressure.

 **POTASSIUM:** An essential mineral that helps regulate fluid balance, nerve signals and muscle contractions.

SPOT THE HIDDEN CULPRITS!

Watch out for fats, salt and sugar which can hide under different names. For example:

Sugar may be called maltose, corn syrup, fructose and sucrose.



Fat may be called lard, shortening and palm kernel oil.



Salt may be referred to on labels as Sodium and could be present in MSG (monosodium glutamate).



TOP TIP!



Ingredients are generally listed according to the amount used – the main ingredients are usually the first three listed. Make sure you get enough beneficial nutrients like protein, dietary fibre, calcium, iron, vitamins, choline, magnesium and potassium.

Scale back on highly processed foods as they often contain lots of salt, sugar and unhealthy fats. Buy whole foods instead.

This information will help you stay on track with your health goals. It also enables you to avoid certain ingredients if you have a food intolerance or are following a diet that excludes certain components like dairy, gluten or nuts.

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HbA1c TEST 101

STAY ON TOP OF YOUR GLUCOSE LEVELS

Managing diabetes can be challenging – keeping track of your blood sugar levels with the **HbA1c test** makes it easier!



WHAT IS IT?

- Haemoglobin A1c test, also known as HbA1c test.
- Measures average blood sugar levels over a 2 - 3 month period.
- Also used to diagnose diabetes.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

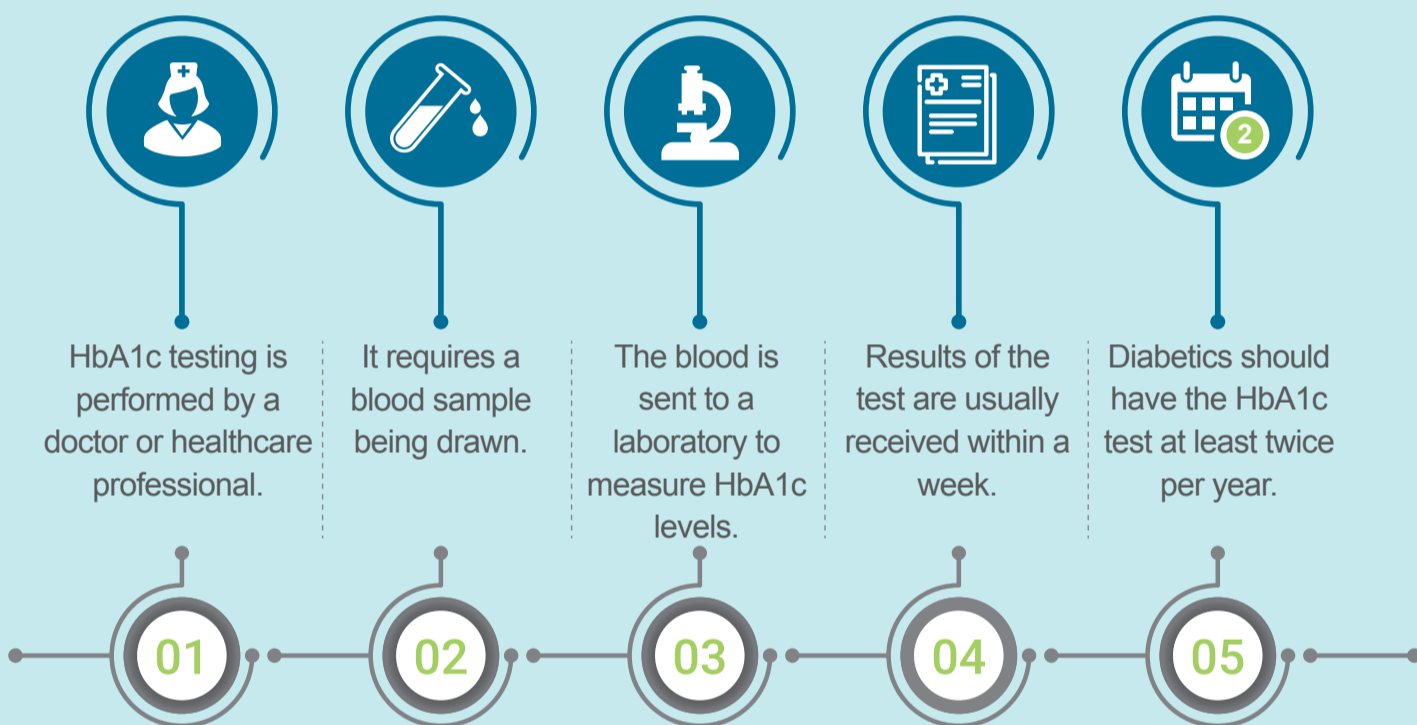
- 1 To keep you informed if your sugar levels are in a healthy range.
- 2 It will also show if your medication needs to be adjusted, and if it's being effective.

Glycation is when glucose sugar binds to your red blood cells.

The higher your blood sugar level, the more red blood cells will be glycated.

Red blood cells exist in the body for about three months, so haemoglobin A1c levels affect blood sugar levels for 8 – 12 weeks.

HOW DOES IT WORK?



NOTE: Fasting or diet considerations aren't necessary, as the HbA1c test is not affected by short-term fluctuations in blood sugar levels.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS MEAN?

<7%

THE RECOMMENDED HbA1c RANGE FOR MOST DIABETICS

Lower levels are fine, but higher levels might mean you have to take tighter control of your blood sugar levels.

KNOW YOUR RESULTS AND STAY HEALTHY



The HbA1c test helps to prevent the risk of serious diabetes-related complications by monitoring 3 month blood sugar levels.



A raised HbA1c result puts you at a higher risk for diabetes complications.



Ask your doctor when your tests are scheduled for and set a reminder on your phone's calendar.



Before your first HbA1c test, ask your doctor to explain what the different results can mean and the necessary steps to stay healthy.



The HbA1c test is usually preferred over the regular finger prick blood sugar test, as it gives an accurate diabetic status.

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Get the most out of your doctors' visits

Come prepared and ask the right questions.

It's important to make the most of your doctor visits. These consultations are often quite short (and costly), so you need to be a strong advocate for yourself.

If you have a chronic condition that has to be managed, shared decision-making is an important factor to consider. This involves a process where your doctor's expertise is combined with your needs, values, goals and circumstances to make decisions about your health.

For shared decision-making to work, you'll have to do some homework to ensure sure you know what you want from your consultations. You should also share as much information as possible with your doctor.

Be prepared

According to Dr Owen Wiese, a general practitioner at Intercare Tyger Valley in Bellville, there are a few questions your doctor will always ask you. Have your answers ready.

- Are you allergic to any medications, substances or foods? How did you realise that you're allergic to them?
- Are you currently using any chronic medication? What are they, and at which dosages are you taking them?
- Have you ever had surgery in the past? When? Were there any complications?
- How many times have you been pregnant? Were there any complications during your pregnancy / pregnancies?
- Which hospital do you usually go to?
- On which medical aid are you? Which plan are you currently on?
- What is your family's medical history (specifically your parents, brothers and sisters)? Are any of them ill?
- Do you smoke?
- Do you drink alcohol? If so, how much on a weekly basis?



Ask your own questions

Dr Wiese suggests the following:

- What is my diagnosis and what does it mean?
- Do I need to make certain lifestyle changes to improve my condition? (This is especially important if you've just been diagnosed with a chronic condition.)
- What is the role of the medication I've been prescribed? Are there any side-effects I should watch out for?
- Which symptoms could indicate that I'm not getting better or that the treatment isn't working?
- Will my medical aid cover my medication and consultations? Are there any co-payments? Does my fund require me to get certain tests or go for regular consultations?

Use a checklist

Questions to your doctor


1	How long will it take before my treatment starts working?	
2	Can I stop the treatment when I feel better?	
3	I think I may be experiencing side effects from my medication. Do I need to change the medication, or will they go away?	
4	(Explain your symptoms to your doctor.) Is this part of my condition? Is there anything I can do about these problems?	
5	I understand that exercise could help my condition. Is there any type of exercise that is unsafe for me to do? Do you have any recommendations?	
6	I am having trouble with my diet and/or weight and/or sleep. What do you recommend?	
7	I have been having trouble managing my other health problems. Can we please discuss my other health concerns?	
8	Will my alcohol and/or tobacco use affect my treatment?	
9	I'd like to check up on my general health regularly. When do I need my next general check-up?	

Good to know

- Remember to regularly visit your doctor if you have a chronic condition.
- Bring a friend or family member along to your consultations if you're worried that you might forget some of the information.
- Make sure you know exactly when and how to take your medication. If necessary, write it down.
- Ask your doctor under which circumstances you can stop using your medication (if at all).
- Check with your doctor when you should come for a follow-up visit.
- Don't be shy to contact your doctor's office if you have more questions.

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The hidden salt that affects your heart

Cut your salt intake to lower your blood pressure.

You should eat no more than 5g of salt per day.

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is a global health issue that's linked to more than nine million deaths per year.

In South Africa, between 42 and 54% of people have high blood pressure. Too much salt can lead to high blood pressure. Keeping a close eye on the amount of salt you eat is important for your health.

How salt affects your blood pressure

A high salt intake interferes with the natural salt balance in your body. This causes fluid retention, which increases the pressure of blood against your artery walls (your blood pressure).

If you have high blood pressure, the force of blood against your artery walls is too high. This makes your heart work harder than it should – a dangerous situation that may end in a heart attack or stroke.

The more salt you eat, the more likely it is that your blood pressure will rise.

How much salt is okay?

Most of us eat far more salt than we should. While our bodies only need about 0.25g of salt each day, most of us take in between 6 and 11g.

Research shows that reducing your salt intake can decrease blood pressure by about 5/2.7mmHg if you have high blood pressure, and by 2/1mmHg if you have normal blood pressure.

You should eat no more than 5g of salt per day. This is the same as one teaspoon of salt, and includes the salt you add when you're cooking and eating as well as the salt that's already in the foods you buy.

The hidden salt in your food

Most salt comes from sodium chloride (NaCl) – a compound often found in foods that don't look or taste particularly salty. Sodium is the part of salt that can increase blood pressure.

More than half of the salt we eat is added during processing. The other half comes from the salt we add during cooking. Processed meats (e.g. sausages), breakfast cereals and even some biscuits, rusks and sweet treats are packed with sodium. In South Africa, most of the salt we eat come from white and brown bread (5-35%).

Say no to salt

- Eat less processed foods (i.e. hamburgers, pizzas, sauces, soup and stock powders).
- Gradually reduce your salt intake. Start by adding less salt to cooked food.
- Don't leave the salt shaker on the table.
- Choose low-sodium salt over normal table salt.
- Use salt-free herbs, spices, onion, chilli and lemon to flavour food.
- If the words "salt" or "sodium" appears on a food label, the product probably contains a substantial dose of salt.
- Cooking from the Heart 2 – a joint initiative by The Heart & Stroke Foundation SA and Pharma Dynamics. Booklet compiled by Heleen Meyer and Ashleigh Badham-Thornhill.
- Look for products (e.g. peanut butter, margarine) that display the heart mark of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa. These have a lower sodium content.

Go for small reductions in salt at first and gradually remove more salt from your diet. Over time, your tastebuds will adapt to lower levels of salt – a process that can take up to two months.

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