

What Are the Legal Requirements For Food Labels?

When exploring food labels it is important to acknowledge that there must be certain components legally printed on the labels.

Nutrition labels must display, clearly, the amount of energy in the food, both in calories and kilojoules. Furthermore, the amount of fat, saturated fats, carbohydrates, proteins, salt and sugars must be expressed in grams. There must be measurements given for 100g of food. These are the basic legal requirements that come out of food labels. There are other things that should be on them as well.

The Legislation

Obviously, there are different types of legislation for food labelling and packaging. It's important to understand what this legislation is if you are going to sell food or even purchase it from a supplier.

Ignorance will not be taken as a suitable defence if you are found to be purchasing food in violation of the regulations, or selling food which is not adequately packaged. You are perfectly entitled to package and sell food so long as it follows and complies with all the legislation necessary. Let's take a look at what you need to know.

Food Labelling Legislation From 1 October 2021

From the 1st of October 2021, a new law came into effect which required all food outlets to provide a full ingredients list with clear allergen labelling on any pre-packaged for direct sale foods. This type of food is food that is prepared, packaged and then sold on the same premises to consumers. The change is the result of a teenager called Natasha Ednan-Laperouse who died after having an allergic reaction to sesame seeds that were part of the dough in a baguette. Consequently, the new legislation is called Natasha's Law.

The Food Labelling Regulations 1996

All food needs to be packaged and labelled in accordance with the food labelling regulations 1996. These regulations control the labelling of the majority of food that is sold to consumers in catering establishments. It's

important to know that not all of the labelling requirements in the regulations apply to every type of food, and there are notable exceptions to the requirements laid down by the regulations.

Failing to comply with the regulations is considered a criminal offence, and would leave a person subject to a fine. These rules are meticulous and offer no room to manoeuvre.

Calorie Labelling Regulations 2022

From the 6th of April 2022, new legislation demands that all food served in bars, restaurants, and cafés has a calorie intake printed on it. Calories must also be printed on the whole food labels, as it is demanded by law. The move is largely understood to be an ongoing effort to combat the obesity crisis that currently grips the UK. It's also been part of an ongoing battle to make sure that there is clear and concise information about the calories inside a specific food item.

Labelling of Prepackaged Food

For legal purposes, prepackaged food is still considered to be of the same calibre as other types of food. You would be expected to have pre-packaged food which is designed and sold with a food label that displays clear nutritional information. In the wake of Natasha's Law from 2021, any pre-packaged food which is sold on the premises needs to have a clear allergen list as well as all the relevant nutritional information.

What Must be Included on the Food Label

There are certain things which must be included on a food label for it to be legal and acceptable packaging.

Name of the Food

The first thing that the label has to contain is the name of the food. This cannot be a misleading label, or one which is deliberately incorrect.

A List of Ingredients

Next up on a food label has to be a list of ingredients. You have to use the heading of "ingredients", and then print every single ingredient used in the making of the product in order of weight. It does not matter how little of a product is used in the food, if it is there, it must be referenced.

Quantity Information

With quantity information, you have to talk about the percentage of the ingredients in the food. If you draw emphasis to a particular ingredient in the packaging of the product, then you have to state the exact quantity of the ingredient as a percentage in the list of ingredients.

For example, if your product is a beef burger, then you have to stipulate what percentage of the burger is beef. For example, your beef burger might be 80% beef.

This requirement is still in effect if you highlight the specific ingredient with a graphic or a picture, such as a picture of cheese on the packaging of your pizza.

Allergen Information

You have a responsibility to display all of the allergens that are part of the product. There are quite a few different types of allergens. These include celery, crustaceans, cereals that contain gluten, fish, milk, eggs, lupin, mollusks, peanuts, sulphur dioxide, mustard, sesame, sulphides, and soybeans.

If your product contains any of these allergens, then you have a legal responsibility to print that very clearly on the packaging. Not only do most companies have a legal disclaimer on the side of the packaging, but they also have the allergen ingredients printed in bold on the ingredients list.

Storage Conditions and Date Labelling

Do you have a legal obligation to print storage conditions and instructions for successfully storing the product once it has been purchased. This instruction should detail what customers need to do with products before and after they purchase them. This helps them to make sure the product remains safe to be consumed. A good example of this might be to store the product in a cool, dry environment, and to consume it within three days once it's been opened.

You also have a responsibility to print proper dates on your packaging. There are two types of dates when it comes to food packaging, there is the "best before" date, which is the date by which you should ideally use the product to get the best quality, and then the "use by" date, which is the

date that you have to use the product to buy otherwise it is technically past the point of safe usage.

Name and Address of Manufacturer

Do you have a legal requirement to print the full name and address of your company on the packaging of each product that you sell. This is for the sake of returns or for somebody who wishes to write in and register a complaint. You have a legal responsibility to do this.

Preparation Instructions

Many types of food, particularly frozen food or pre-packaged ready meals require preparation instructions to be clearly printed. There are certain things that need to make up your [preparation instructions](#).

You have to print certain instructions to specify how a product can be prepared in different ways. The most frequent example is when a product can be put into an oven to cook or could be cooked in the microwave.

You have to print two specific sets of instructions for each method of cooking, specifying the temperature that the device needs to be at, the duration that it needs to be cooked for, and whether or not the product needs to be turned over or stirred midway through the cooking process.

Nutritional Declaration

If you're going to package and sell food in the UK, you have a legal responsibility to include a nutritional declaration. Essentially, this is a legally binding and scientific declaration which points out what percentage of the daily intake a human should consume your product has.

So, for example, a can of fizzy drink might contain 20% of the sugars that are part of a recommended daily intake for adults. If it does, you have a legal obligation to point this out, as well as to point out what percentage of the product contains that percentage. In most cases, values are given per 100mL or 100g of product.

This nutritional declaration is a legal prerequisite of the food packaging that is to be sold in the UK. If you take a look at things like a can of fizzy drink, a sandwich, a box of cereal, or even something like a bag of chips, you will see that there is nutritional information printed.

Country or Place of Origin

You have a legal obligation to state the country of origin that your product comes from. You cannot imply that your product comes from anywhere else besides where it was manufactured from. So, for example, if your fish that is part of your product was sourced in Canada, and then shipped across to the UK, and then produced as part of a meal, you cannot say that it is 100% British fish.

Simply put, to do so would be a violation of packaging and labelling law which states that you cannot deliberately attempt to mislead consumers about the details of the product.