



A SHORT, PLAIN GUIDE

Scan *First*

What a two-second scan tells you about your food — and the handful of things it can't.



Ketolock

Small habits count, scan the meal first.

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Before you start

Nothing here is medical advice. This is a guide to reading a label accurately — what each number means, how it is calculated, and where the common traps are. What you do with that is between you and whoever advises you on your health.

Why scanning beats guessing

A barcode is the only part of a package that cannot be styled, cropped or written by a copywriter. It is an index into a database, and it takes two seconds to read.

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Scanning does the arithmetic. This book is about the part scanning cannot do for you — knowing what the numbers you get back actually mean, and where the label they came from has its blind spots.

Words on the front — *keto, low carb, smart, balanced, guilt-free* — are mostly unregulated in most markets. Nobody has to prove them. The nutrition panel on the back, by contrast, has legally defined formats, rounding rules and required disclosures.

This is not a claim that manufacturers lie. It is simpler than that: the front is written to make you pick the box up, and the back is written because the law requires it. When they disagree, the back wins.

The habit

Turn the pack over before you read the front. Once you have seen the number, the front of the pack can't frame it for you.

TWO

Serving size changes every other number

Every figure on the panel is "per serving". Change the serving and you change all of them at once.

A serving is not a portion. It is a reference amount, and it does not have to match what a reasonable person eats in one sitting. A small bag can be two servings. A bottle can be two and a half.

So the first number to find is not carbohydrate. It is **servings per container**, followed by the serving size itself, in grams or millilitres rather than in cups or pieces. Grams don't argue.

READ THIS FIRST

THEN ASK

Servings per container

Am I eating one serving, or the container?

Serving size in grams

What does my actual portion weigh?

Everything else

Multiply accordingly.

If you eat the whole packet, the numbers on the label were never about your meal.

THREE

Total carbs, net carbs, and why the label moved

"Net carbs" appears on no regulator's label. It is a calculation people do on top of one.

On a United States or Canadian label, **Total Carbohydrate** already includes dietary fibre and sugar alcohols. The common net-carb calculation subtracts them back out:

The usual calculation

Net carbs = Total Carbohydrate – Dietary Fibre – Sugar Alcohols

Two honest caveats. First, this is a convention, not a law — no authority defines it, and different apps and brands apply it slightly differently, particularly on sugar alcohols. Second, subtracting *all* sugar alcohols assumes they all behave alike. They don't, which is the next page but one.

Why it matters

Two products can show the same "net carbs" on the front while having very different total carbohydrate, fibre and sugar-alcohol composition behind it. The headline number hides the working.

FOUR

The same food, two different labels

This is the single most reliable way to get carbohydrate wrong, and almost nobody knows about it.

In the **United States and Canada**, the "Total Carbohydrate" figure *includes* fibre. In the **United Kingdom, the European Union and Australia**, the "Carbohydrate" figure *already excludes* fibre — fibre is listed separately, and is not part of the carbohydrate number at all.

LABEL ORIGIN

DOES "CARBOHYDRATE" INCLUDE FIBRE?

United States, Canada

Yes — subtract fibre yourself

UK, EU, Australia, NZ

No — it is already excluded

The consequence: if you apply the American net-carb subtraction to a British label, **you subtract fibre that was never counted**, and you under-report the carbohydrate in your own food.

Imported products make this a live problem in an ordinary kitchen. A European chocolate bar and an American one, sitting on the same shelf, are labelled to different conventions.

The habit

Check where the pack was labelled before you subtract anything. If the panel says "of which fibre" separately from carbohydrate, the subtraction is already done.

FIVE

Sugar alcohols are not one ingredient

They sit on one line of the label and behave nothing alike in the body.

Sugar alcohols — polyols — are grouped together on the panel. Treating that single line as uniformly "free" is where a lot of carefully-counted days come apart.

COMMONLY SEEN

WORTH KNOWING

Erythritol	Largely absorbed and excreted unchanged; minimal effect on blood glucose
Maltitol	Substantially digested; a meaningfully higher glycemic response than erythritol
Xylitol, sorbitol	Intermediate; also common causes of digestive upset in quantity
Allulose	A rare sugar, not a polyol; regulators in some markets now exclude it from sugars

A bar sweetened with maltitol and a bar sweetened with erythritol can show identical "net carbs" after subtraction. They are not the same product.

One line on the label. Several different ingredients hiding inside it.

Zero doesn't always mean zero

Labels round. Small amounts are permitted to be declared as none.

Under United States rules, an amount below half a gram per serving may be declared as **0 g**. The same principle applies to several nutrients, and comparable allowances exist in other markets.

For one serving of one thing, this is immaterial. It stops being immaterial when a product is engineered so that a serving falls just under the threshold, and you have four servings.

Where to look instead

If the panel says zero but the ingredients list names a sugar, the answer is "less than half a gram per serving", not "none". The ingredients list is the tiebreaker.

The same logic applies to "calorie free", "fat free" and similar phrases. These are defined thresholds, not absolutes — a legal definition of *small*, not a claim of *absent*.

The ingredients list is ranked

It is ordered by weight, heaviest first. That ordering tells you more than most of the panel.

If a sweetener appears in the first three ingredients, it is a major component regardless of what the front says. If it appears last, it is a trace.

Sugar has many names

Sugars can be listed under dozens of names, and splitting one sweetener across several forms can push each individual entry further down the list. Common examples include:

- Syrups — glucose, corn, rice, tapioca, malt, golden
- -ose endings — dextrose, maltose, fructose, sucrose
- Concentrates — fruit juice concentrate, cane juice, molasses
- Honey, agave, coconut sugar, date sugar

The habit

Read the first three ingredients. You will learn more in four seconds than from the entire front of the pack.

EIGHT

Words that mean something, words that don't

Some phrases on packaging are legally defined. Many are not.

PHRASE	STATUS
Sugar free	Defined threshold in most markets — a limit, not an absolute
No added sugar	Defined — but says nothing about sugar naturally present
Keto / keto-friendly	Not defined. No threshold, no standard, no enforcement
Low carb	Not defined in most markets
Natural	Weakly defined or undefined depending on market
Gluten free	Defined, and enforced, with a specific parts-per-million limit

The useful distinction is not honest versus dishonest. It is **defined versus undefined**. A defined term has a number behind it that someone can be held to. An undefined one is a description of intent.

The sixty-second check

In order. It takes about a minute the first few times, and about ten seconds after that.

- ☐ **Servings per container.** Am I eating one, or all of them?
- ☐ **Serving size in grams.** How does that compare to my actual portion?
- ☐ **Where was this labelled?** US and Canada include fibre in carbohydrate. UK, EU and Australia do not.
- ☐ **Carbohydrate, fibre, sugar alcohols.** Read all three, not the front-of-pack summary.
- ☐ **Which sugar alcohol?** The ingredients list will say. Erythritol and maltitol are not equivalent.
- ☐ **First three ingredients.** What is this food actually mostly made of?
- ☐ **Any zeros?** If the panel says none but the ingredients disagree, trust the ingredients.

One habit, not seven

Nobody does all of this every time, and you don't need to. Doing the first two — servings, then grams — catches the large majority of surprises on its own. Start there.

AND THEN

Small habits *count.*

Reading a label well is a skill, and like any skill it is slow until it isn't. The checklist on the last page is the whole thing.

Ketolock exists to do the arithmetic part — photograph a plate or scan a barcode and it gives you an editable estimate of the carbohydrate, so the counting stops being the reason you give up.

It is an estimate and a starting point. It does not diagnose anything, measure anything in your blood, or detect gluten or allergens — it cannot tell you a food is safe. For that, the label and your own judgement remain the authority.

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or scan, if you're
reading this on paper

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