Health Star Ratings:

**How they are calculated**

**What is the Health Star Ratings system?**

It is a voluntary front-of-pack labelling system for packaged foods. The system rates foods from half a star to five stars based on their nutrient content.

The selection of nutrients used to analyse and rate packaged foods reflects the New Zealand Eating and Activity Guidelines (EAG). All packaged foods contain a variety of nutrients in different amounts. The system works by calculating the contribution of key nutrients to the overall nutrient content of the packaged food and assigning a rating score.

**Algorithm explained**

Health Stars are calculated by an algorithm that assigns points based on the nutrient content of 100 grams (or mls) of a food. The algorithm was developed by a working group of public health, government and industry experts using current evidence and dietary guidelines. It is based on the Nutrient Profiling Scoring Criteria developed as part of Standard 1.2.7 of the joint Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

The algorithm considers the negative nutrients the EAG recommends eating less of (energy, saturated fat, sugars, sodium), and positive nutrients the EAG recommends eating more of (protein, dietary fibre, fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes). Health Stars are calculated by balancing these negative and positive components of the food per 100 grams (or mls) with the algorithm adjusted for different categories of foods. Negative points can be partially offset by points accumulated for positive nutrients.

Health Star Ratings are designed so that all risk-associated (negative) nutrients have roughly twice the impact on final scores compared with the beneficial-offset (positive) nutrients. Foods with

**In a nutshell**

- The Health Stars algorithm provides an overall assessment of the key components of a packaged food (both positive and negative) and gives an “at a glance” rating.

- The energy, saturated fat, sugar and sodium content of food has much greater impact on the Health Star Rating than the positive nutrients.

- All foods contribute energy to the diet. Eating too much of any food (even a five star-rated food) will contribute excess energy.

- Health Star Ratings are a voluntary front-of-pack labelling system for packaged foods. They provide a quick easy way for shoppers to compare similar packaged foods and choose the healthier option. The more stars, the healthier the packaged food.
a high concentration of one of the risk
associated nutrients eg, high sugar content
are dealt with harshly by the system. They
accumulate both sugar and energy points. It is
important to note fruit, vegetable, nut and legume
content must be over 40% of the total food before
they can start counting towards Health Stars
and improve the rating. Adding small amounts of
these ingredients to a food will not increase the
number of Health Stars a food gets.

Health Stars has led to some manufacturers
reformulating their products in order to improve
the nutritional profile and achieve a better
rating. This is one of the desired outcomes of
the system.

Why we shouldn’t
focus on a single
nutrient

• A number of nutrients contribute to our
  health or risk of developing disease. The
  EAG encourages people to choose a wide
  range of foods in order to provide all the
  essential nutrients needed. A focus on
  avoiding or eating one particular nutrient can
  inadvertently result in an unhealthy diet.

• EAG recommendations to limit sugar intake
  refer specifically to free sugars. Free sugars
  include all sugar added to food as well as
  those present in fruit juice, syrups and honey.
  This recommendation does not apply to the
  sugar that is found naturally in the structure
  of foods, such as whole fruit and dairy
  products.

• There are also many foods associated with
  non-communicable disease risk that have
  very low sugar content, such as foods high
  in saturated fat or sodium. The Health Star
  Rating system will identify these and assign
  low scores.

Why do we need
Health Stars?

• People generally know fresh fruits and
  vegetables are healthy but can find it difficult
to interpret labels on packaged foods. Health Stars are designed to help people
choose the healthier options when buying
packaged foods.

• Many healthy foods undergo some
  processing and packaging, such as milk,
  rolled oats, tinned tomatoes and frozen
  vegetables. Health Stars help people
  choose which packaged food is healthier.

• Not everyone has the time to read the
  nutrition information panel on the pack, or the
time and resources to buy and prepare only
  whole foods – packaged foods are a reality
  of life for most families. Health Stars make it
  quick and easy to compare similar packaged
  foods (eg, breakfast cereals with other
  breakfast cereals) when grocery shopping.

More information
online

• From Ministry for Primary Industries:
  mpi.govt.nz/healthstars

• From HPA: nutritionandactivity.govt.nz/
  health-star-ratings

[Image of Health Star Ratings]