

By Natalie Huckstepp &
Goodnessly

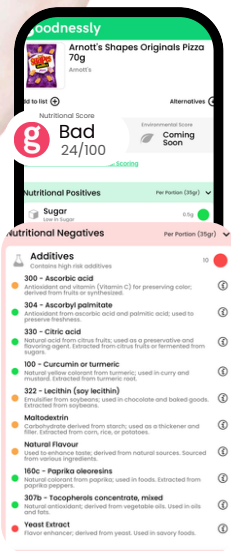
FOOD ADDITIVES

A
COMPLETE
GUIDE



FOOD ADDITIVES

goodnessly



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Introduction

Food additives have been added to food products to enhance the shelf life, quality, appearance and flavour.

While food additives play a crucial role in preserving ingredients and used in modern processing, there have been effects on children's health growing a global concern for families and researchers worldwide.

This eBook will explore what **food additives** are and the impact **on children's health** and provide insights on how families can combat food additives.

About this Ebook

This ebook is designed to help Australian families understand food additives and make informed choices about the foods they purchase. While the information is based on current research, food science is constantly evolving.

This ebook is not a substitute for professional medical or nutritional advice. Always consult with a qualified healthcare professional or registered dietitian before making significant dietary changes for your child.

Disclaimer

This ebook is educational only and not a substitute for professional medical advice. Always consult a healthcare professional, pediatrician, or registered dietitian before making dietary changes for your child, especially if your child has allergies, asthma, ASD, or other medical conditions.

Individual responses to food additives vary significantly. The information in this ebook is based on current research, but scientific understanding evolves. Associations discussed do not prove causation.

Food additives discussed have been approved by regulatory bodies (FSANZ, EFSA, FDA) at specific levels. Approval does not mean risk-free, but indicates safety at approved consumption levels.

Food swap suggestions are general guidance only. Consult a registered dietitian to ensure your child's nutritional needs are met.

This ebook is not intended to diagnose, treat, or prevent any disease. If your child experiences adverse reactions, consult a healthcare professional immediately.

By using this ebook, you agree to consult qualified healthcare professionals before making health-related decisions for your child.

Chapter 1

What are food additives?



What are food additives?

Food additives are ingredients added to foods to improve the taste, texture, appearance or shelf life. Additives are added to ensure that food remains in good condition from the farm, to factories, to warehouses and then finally to local grocery stores.

In today's market, there are thousands of food additives used enhance food products (World Health Organization, 2023).



Types of food additives

Food additives can be categorised into different types of additives. The main types of additives are:

- preservatives;
- artificial colouring;
- flavouring agents;
- sweeteners

used to enhance the flavour of food products and creating a longer shelf-life for food.

Preservatives

Preservatives is used for food fresh for longer, preventing mold or to be spoiled. An example of this can be sulphur dioxide – preservative (220) which is added to meat products to limit microbial growth. Another example of identifying common preservatives is sodium benzoate (E211) and sorbic acid (E200).

Artificial colouring

Artificial colouring is used to make food look visually appealing and colourful, such as using bright colours in lollies. Some examples of artificial colouring's is Tartrazine (E102) and Allura Red (E129) (McCarthy, 2021).

Flavouring agents

Flavouring agents is used to improve taste in food such as beeswax glazing agent used to coat apples to improve their taste and appearance.

Sweeteners

Sweeteners are added into foods to sweeten food products without using sugar, sweeteners can be found in 'diet' or 'no sugar' drinks. Some examples of sweeteners found in diet drinks is Aspartame (E951) or natural sweeteners such as stevia (E960) (Australia, 2021).

Emulsifiers and stabilizers

Emulsifiers and stabilizers are used in food products to maintain food texture and ensuring the consistency of incompatible ingredients are blended. An example of this is incorporating oil and water together in a food product. Emulsifiers are often found in salad dressing, sauces and margarine (Craft, 2024).



Emulsifiers and stabilizers continued

Some examples of emulsifier additives are Lecithin (E322) and mono-diglycerides (E471). Stabilizers are used in food products to keep mixtures stable over time and prevent separation and support emulsifiers. Some examples of stabilizers are Carrageenan (E407) and xanthan gum (E415) (Craft, 2024).

Thickeners and gelling agents

Thickeners and gelling agents are used to adjust and increase the thickness of a product without changing the flavour. Thickeners form a gel-like consistency and create textures such as soups, sauces and gravy. Some examples of thickeners are cornstarch, pectin (E440) and some starches.

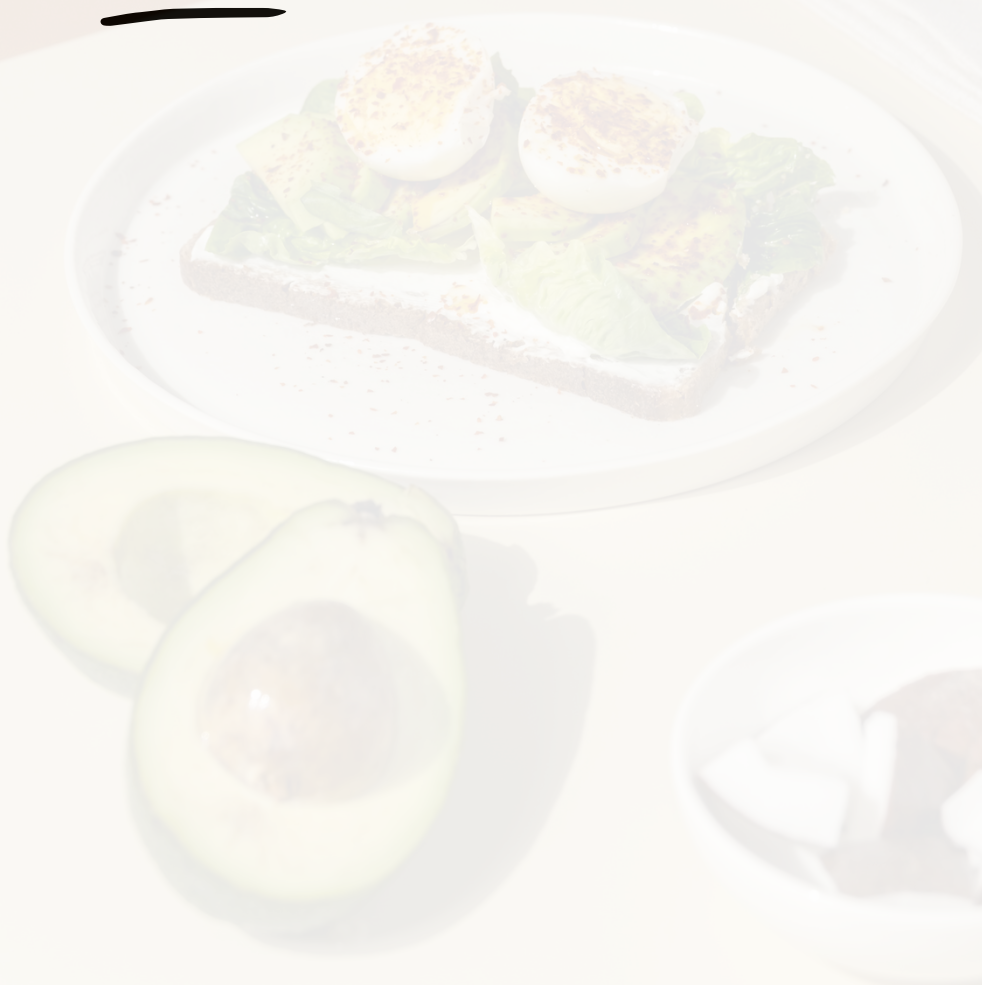
Whereas gelling agents are used to create a firm or jelly-like consistency and used in jellies, sauces and desserts. Gelling agent additives can be Gelatine and pectin (Craft, 2024).

Where can we find them?

Food additives are listed on the ingredient label found on the back of packaged foods. They are listed at the end of the ingredient list. Food additives are then listed by their name or E- number, which is a code to standardise food additives.



Chapter 2



The hidden dangers of food additives

Risks

A common risk when consuming food additives is gaining allergic reactions, especially in growing children.

Additives such as artificial colours and preservatives such as tartrazine and sulphates, can trigger reactions for sensitive children. These reactions can range from mild skin rashes to behaviours and respiratory issues (Aitchison, 2024).

Sulphites

Research suggests sulphites may trigger asthmatic symptoms in some individuals. Studies indicate that 5–10% of people with asthma may experience wheezing, chest tightness and cough when exposed to sulphites (DeChristopher & Tucker, 2020). Sulphites are used to preserve the flavour and inhibit the growth of bacteria in food and drink products and medications.

Sulphites can result in intolerances which may cause and trigger symptoms such as wheezing, allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and urticaria (hives) in asthmatic individuals. Adverse reactions to sulphites can occur even when an individual has never had asthma (ASCIA, 2021).

Allergens

Allergens can sometimes be hidden with other food ingredients, such as casein and whey which is derived from milk products and albumin which is derived from eggs. Therefore, if your child has an intolerance to these food products, looking out for these types of additives will be beneficial for your children's health (Steinman, 1996).

Hyperactivity in children

Research by McCann et al. (2007) suggests associations between artificial food colours and preservatives and hyperactivity and behavioural issues in some children. Some studies suggest that artificial colours and sodium benzoate may be linked to increased hyperactivity and attention problems in sensitive children, which could potentially affect learning. Individual responses vary significantly.

Gut health

Some research suggests additives may affect gut microbiome balance in certain individuals. Evidence has shown that emulsifiers, sweeteners, colours may affect the gut microbiome and result in intestinal issues and inflammation.

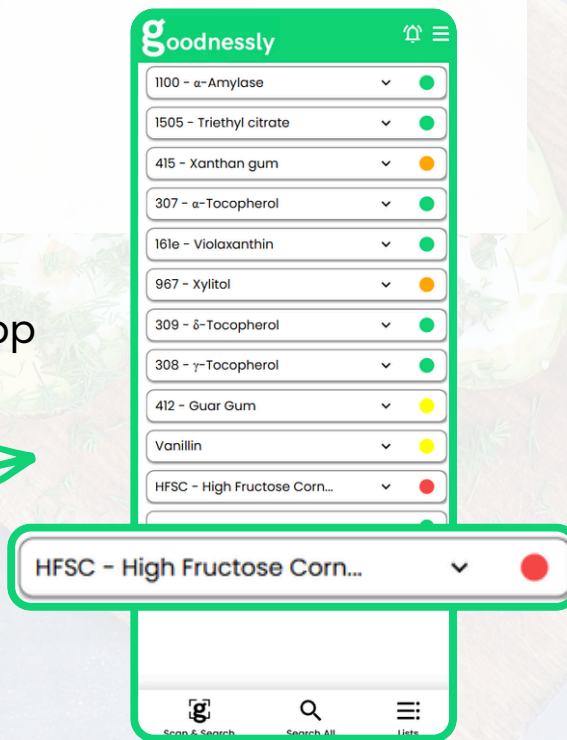
Some research suggests that emulsifiers may potentially disrupt the intestinal barrier and affect gut microbiota in certain individuals, which could promote inflammation. While these findings are emerging, more research is needed to fully understand the long-term effects and individual variations in response. (Urrutia-Pereira et al., 2025).

How does additives affect human health?

In today's society, the prevalence of processed foods has made high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) a staple additive in many households.

HFCS is an artificial sweetener, derived from corn starch and has gained popularity for its potential risks to children's health. This section will explore the intricacies of HFCS, common sources and why it may raise concerns for children.

The Goodnessly App



High fructose corn syrup?

High fructose corn syrup also known as HFCS is an artificial sweetener derived from corn starch, containing varying amounts of fructose and glucose.

Studies have shown that the fructose and glucose ratio in food products is continuing to increase and becoming a prominent additive in today's market (DeChristopher & Tucker, 2020).

The most common forms are HFCS-42 and HFCS-55 found in soft drinks, baked good and processed snacks (Mawer, 2019).

HFCS contains 55% of fructose, a type of sugar which takes your body more steps to breakdown in the body, in comparison to glucose (Mawer, 2019).

High consumption of fructose can lead to health implications in children.

High Fructose Corn Syrup continued

Research by DeChristopher and Tucker (2020) found associations between high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) consumption and increased asthma prevalence among some young children. However, more research is needed to establish causation. This may be linked due to the significant use of HFCS in food products across the world, particularly found in soft drinks.

Studies have shown that HFCS contain a higher fructose-to-glucose ratio which is increasing in food products than ever before.

Some researchers suggest that excess free fructose may potentially lead to gastrointestinal issues, which could be linked to inflammation and asthmatic symptoms in sensitive individuals. However, individual responses vary (DeChristopher & Tucker, 2020).





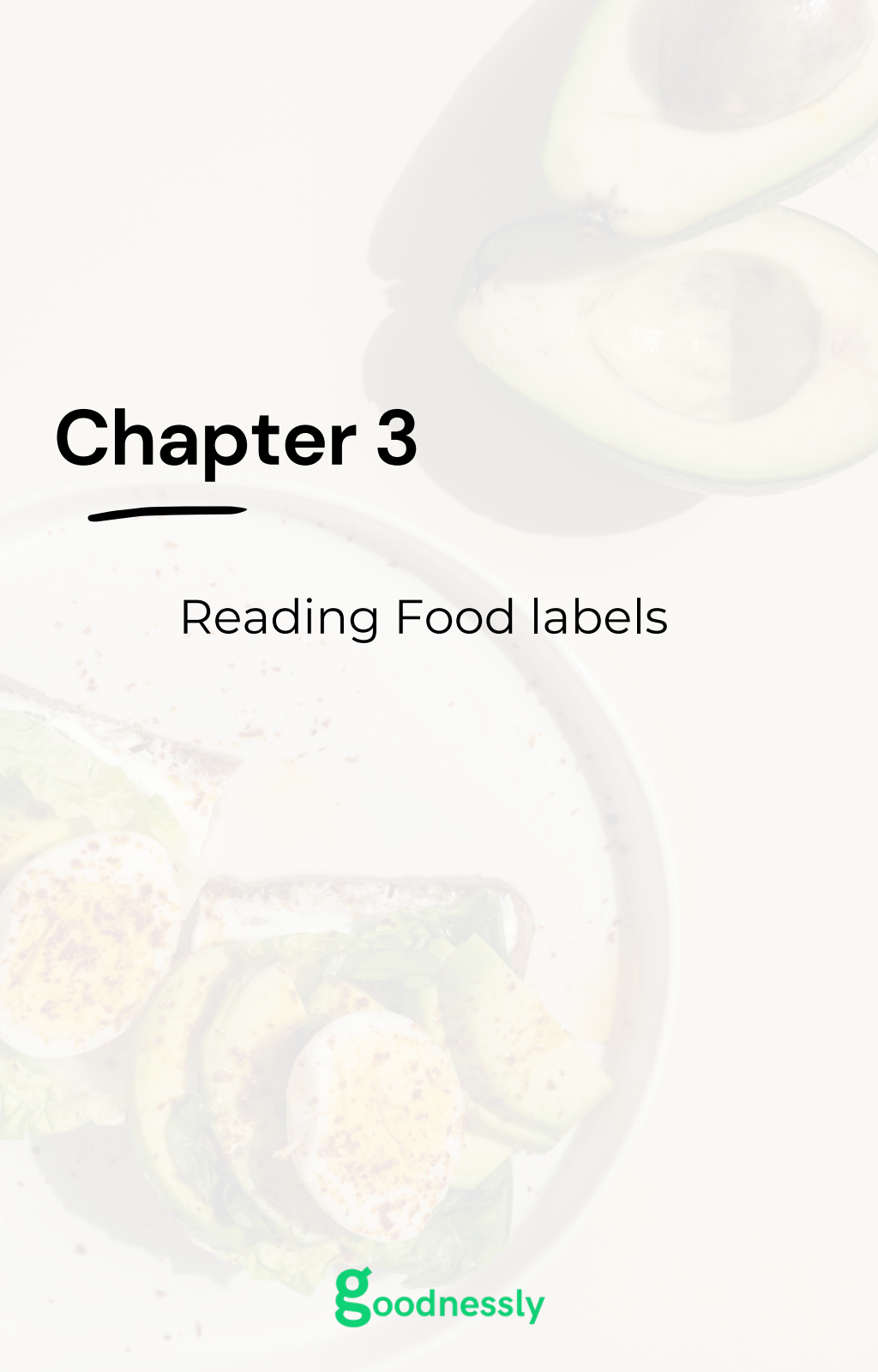
High Fructose Corn Syrup and weight gain in children

Research suggests that overconsumption of HFCS may be associated with increased risk of obesity in some children.

Fructose is metabolised in the liver and converted into fat. Research suggests this metabolic process may potentially contribute to insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease in some individuals. However, individual factors vary significantly. (Mawer, 2019).

These conditions can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular risk later in life. As HFCS are often found in sugary drinks and snacks, which contain high calories and low in nutritional value (Clinic, 2025).

Consuming foods high in HFCS may contribute to exceeding daily caloric needs, leading to potential and unwanted weight gain and obesity. Food and drinks high in HFCS, do not promote feelings of fullness which may lead to overeating (Clinic, 2025).

The background of the page features a soft-focus photograph of a healthy meal. In the upper right, two halves of an avocado are visible. In the lower left, a white bowl contains a salad with lettuce, sliced avocado, and a hard-boiled egg, all topped with a sprinkle of red seasoning. The overall aesthetic is clean and fresh, with a light green color palette.

Chapter 3

Reading Food labels



So, what should families look for?

More and more , food labels are becoming harder to interpret. While packaging focuses on marketing words such as low sugar, high fibre, they often don't point out the hidden nasties such as harmful additives. Regulations generally do not require food additives to be fully labelled using only numbers. In most regions, including Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union, manufacturers have the choice to use either the prescribed name of the additive or its internationally recognised code number. This make it harder for every day consumers to discern what's in their food and the impact it could be having on their health.

Some additives may have negative effects, particularly on children's health and are even banned or have warning labels on them in some countries. Some food additives can include high-fructose corn syrup and artificial colours. Which may lead to unwanted weight gain and hyperactivity in children.

How to read food labels



Check the first few ingredients



Understand nutrition claims



Serving size and per 100g values



Check for calories per serving



Identifying allergens



Nutritional information



Watch out for numbers or names you don't recognise

Nutritional labels explained

Reading a food label might seem overwhelming at first, but once you know what to look for, it becomes second nature. Every packaged food in Australia is required to display a nutrition information panel—and this is your secret weapon for making healthier choices for your kids.

In this section, we'll break down each part of the nutrition label so you can confidently spot the healthier options in seconds. Think of it as learning the language the manufacturer uses to tell you what's really in the food.

Want to make it even easier? The Goodnessly app scans any product barcode and instantly analyzes its nutritional value, flags additives, and gives you a clear score. No more squinting at labels—just scan and compare.

Serving Size
The manufacturer decides what counts as one serving. This varies between brands, so always check this first.

Fats
Compare the per 100g column between products. Look for lower total fat and especially lower saturated fat.

Dietary Fiber
Higher fibre is better for digestion. Choose products with more fibre per 100g.

Sodium
Too much salt isn't good for kids. Compare the per 100g column and choose lower sodium options.

Per 100g Column
Use this to fairly compare two similar products. It levels the playing field since serving sizes differ.

Allergies
Common allergens (milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, sesame, soy, wheat, fish, shellfish) are listed in bold.

Sugars
Includes added and natural sugars. Choose foods lower in added sugar. Check the ingredients list to see if sugar is in the first few ingredients.

Nutrition Information
Serving size: 18g. Servings per pack: 1

	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	379kJ 78Cal	1826kJ 436Cal
Protein	1.7g	9.4g
Fat -total	1.8g	9.9g
-saturated	0.3g	1.6g
Carbohydrate	3.1g	17.7g
-total sugar	0.6g	3.6g
Dietary Fibre	0.1g	0.3g
Sodium	127mg	705mg

Ingredients:
Wheat **Flour**, Water, Vegetable Oil (Palm Oil), Cheese Powder (Milk, Salt, Enzymes), Sugar, Salt, Baking Powder (Sodium Bicarbonate), Natural Flavour
Contains: Wheat, Milk

Ingredients
Listed from most to least by weight. If sugar, fat, or salt is in the first three ingredients, it's heavily processed. Fewer ingredients = less processed.

Understanding E-Numbers and Food Additives

When you flip over a food package and scan the ingredients list, you'll often see numbers in brackets or with an "E" prefix. These are food additives—ingredients added to preserve freshness, improve colour, enhance flavour, or change texture. In Australia and Europe, additives are identified by E-numbers (E100 to E1520), while in some products you might also see plain numbers in brackets like (551) or (307). Learning to spot these is one of the easiest ways to identify ultra-processed foods.

E-numbers are organized by category:

- **E1xx (Colours):** E102 (Tartrazine – yellow), E110 (Sunset Yellow), E129 (Allura Red), E150d (Caramel colour)
- **E2xx (Preservatives):** E200 (Sorbic acid), E211 (Sodium benzoate), E220 (Sulphur dioxide)
- **E3xx (Antioxidants):** E307 (Alpha-tocopherol), E330 (Citric acid)
- **E4xx (Thickeners, Stabilizers, Emulsifiers):** E322 (Lecithin), E407 (Carrageenan), E415 (Xanthan gum), E471 (Mono and diglycerides)
- **E5xx (Anti-caking agents):** E551 (Silicon dioxide)
- **E6xx (Flavour enhancers):** E621 (Monosodium glutamate – MSG)





Understanding E-Numbers and Food Additives

Real-world example: Look at a box of flavoured rice crackers. The ingredients might read: "Rice flour, vegetable oil, salt, sugar, E150d (caramel colour), E322 (lecithin), E471 (emulsifier), E330 (citric acid), E551 (anti-caking agent)." This product has five different additives—a sign it's heavily processed. A healthier alternative might be plain rice crackers with just three ingredients: rice, oil, and salt.

The more E-numbers you see, the more processed the food. While some additives are considered safe at approved levels, many parents prefer to choose foods with fewer additives, especially for young children. A simple rule: if you can't pronounce it or don't recognize it, it's probably an additive. Start reading labels with this in mind, and you'll quickly become skilled at spotting which foods are truly whole and which are heavily engineered.

Check the first few ingredients

Check the first few ingredients

Ingredients are listed by weight, ranging from highest-lowest. Not all ingredients are recognisable and be wary of numbers.

The first ingredient on the food label can make up a bulk percentage of the product.

Aim to avoid products with a long list of artificial additives, preservatives and sugars. These products may be ultra-processed and contain high fat, carbohydrates and sugar.

Understand nutrition claims

Majority of products in the supermarket may contain health claims such as 'reduced salt', 'low fat', 'low sugar' or 'low carbohydrate'.

These products can make these health claims, but they may not be necessarily healthy. For example, a 'low fat' product may have been ultra-processed and may contain a high caloric (energy) content.

This product may also be low in protein, fibre and micronutrients to satiate hunger through the day (Health Direct, 2019).

Serving size and per 100g values

The serving size of a product can vary between products and the nutritional information is based on the amount.

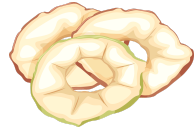
Serving size is the standard amount of a food individuals should consume, which can be measured in cups, ounces, grams or pieces.

Every food product has different serving sizes, an example of this is one apple is one , while 1 of dried fruit is 3 pieces.

1 =



1 =



Calories per serving

Calories is essentially the energy you get from one serving, when looking at food products, be aware of how the calories from that food product contributes into your daily caloric intake.

Excessive caloric intake can lead to unwanted weight gain, obesity, and other related health issues (Woteki & Thomas, 2016), though not all calories are equal so don't base everything off of this.

Identifying allergens

Identifying allergens is essential for children with allergies, intolerances or food preferences.

The first few ingredients may be present with high quantities of allergens, therefore try to scan through the entire list carefully.

The food label will contain an allergen statement of what allergens which may be present, such as eggs, nuts, wheat, gluten or dairy.

Nutritional information

Key nutrients for children and families can include carbohydrates, sugars, fats, protein and fibre.

For food products marketed for children, families should aim for limiting added sugars, saturated fats, and food additives (NHMRC, 2021).

Aim to:



**purchase foods low in added sugars,
saturated fat and additives**



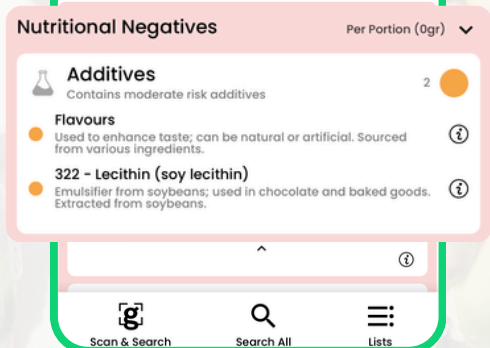
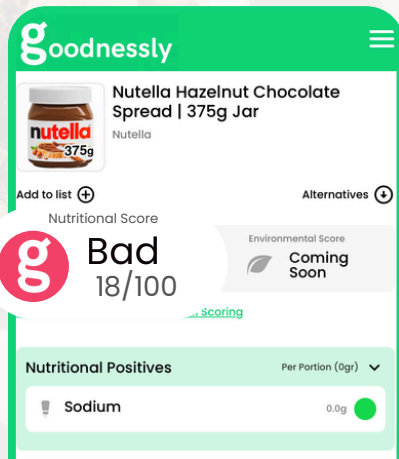
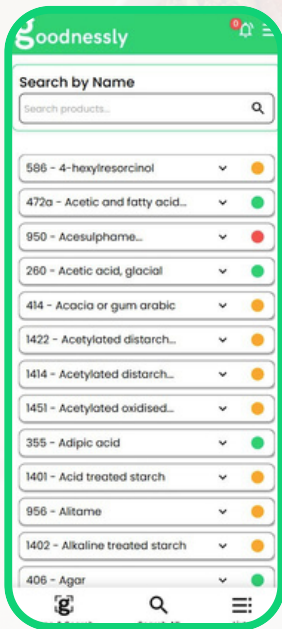
**consume foods high in fibre, protein and
complex carbohydrate, emphasizing on
wholegrains, fruits and vegetables**



**Consume sugar, fats, highly processed food and
carbohydrate in moderation**

Chapter 4

What additives to avoid?

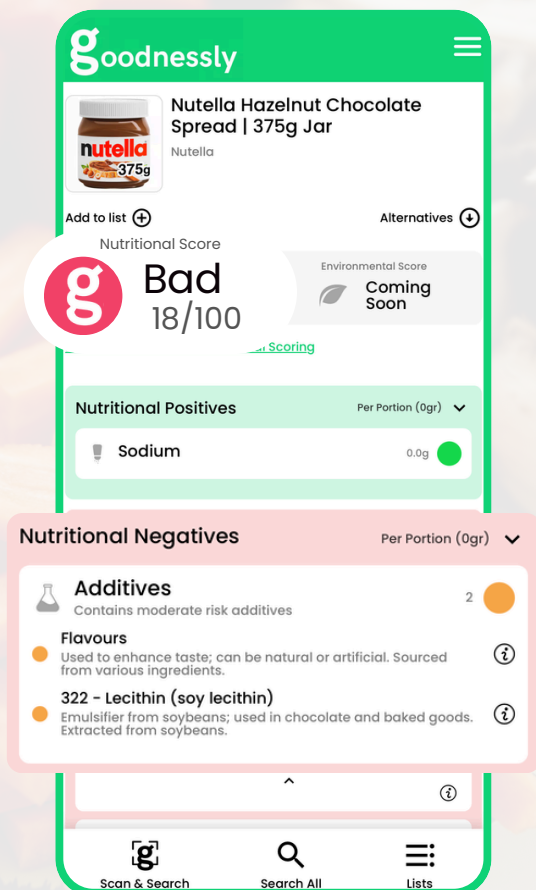


The Goodnessly App



So, what additives should families look out for?

This chapter will emphasise on the **top additives** families should avoid for children to consume.



Some top additives we suggest to avoid.

For a complete list, download the **goodnessly app**

HIGH-CONCERN FOOD ADDITIVES

Ingredients to Watch Out For

- Sulphur dioxide (220)
- Sodium nitrate (251)
- Aspartame (951)
- Carrageenan (407)
- Tartrazine (102)
- Quinoline (184)
- Amaranth (132)
- Indigotine (133)
- Fast green FCF (143)
- Caramel IV (150d)
- Brilliant black BN (151)
- Brown HT (155)
- Aluminium monosilicate (554)
- Polyoxyethylene (40) stearate (431)
- Polysorbate 80 or Polyoxyethylene (20) sorbitan monoleate (433)



Top additives to avoid for kids

Some additives explained

Monosodium glutamate (MSG)

Is a flavour enhancer commonly found in fast food restaurants, processed meats and condiments. While some individuals report sensitivity to MSG, regulatory bodies including the FDA classify MSG as 'Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS)' at approved levels.

Foods containing MSG are often ultra-processed and may contain high sodium, fat, and refined ingredients. (Warner, 2024).

Artificial colouring

Some research has linked artificial colouring to food allergies and gastrointestinal and respiratory problems in sensitive individuals. Studies suggest that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be more sensitive to colour additives and may experience behaviour changes or hyperactivity. (de Oliveira et al., 2024). However, regulatory bodies have approved these additives for use at specific levels

Top additives to avoid for kids

Some additives explained

Sodium Nitrite

Sodium nitrite is a preservative commonly used in processed meats such as hot dogs and bacon to prevent bacterial growth and retain the natural pink or red colour in meats.

Some research suggests sodium nitrite may be converted into nitrosamines in the stomach, which has been associated with increased cancer risk in some studies (Sindelar et al., 2011). However, regulatory bodies including FSANZ approve sodium nitrite for use in processed meats at specific levels deemed safe for consumption .

Guar Gum

Guar gum is a thickening agent often used in gluten-free products, while generally considered safe, excessive consumption may cause digestive issues such as bloating and abdominal gas.

Children may be sensitive to Guar gum as it may cause stress on the digestive system (Spaeder, n.d.).





Top additives to avoid for kids

Some additives explained

High-Fructose Corn Syrup

High fructose corn syrup also known as HFCS is an artificial sweetener derived from corn starch and primarily found in juice, soft drinks, snacks and other food products (Clinic, 2025).

Consuming foods high in HFCS may contribute to exceeding daily caloric needs, leading to potential and unwanted weight gain and obesity (Clinic, 2025).

Carrageenan

Carrageenan is a thickening and stabilising agent derived from red seaweed commonly used in dairy and plant-based products.

In sensitive individuals, carrageenan may potentially cause gastrointestinal inflammation, stomach discomfort, or digestive issues. While some research suggests a possible link to inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), more research is needed. Regulatory bodies have approved carrageenan for use at specific levels. (IBD) (Borsani et al., 2021).

Top additives to avoid for kids

Some additives explained

Sodium Benzoate

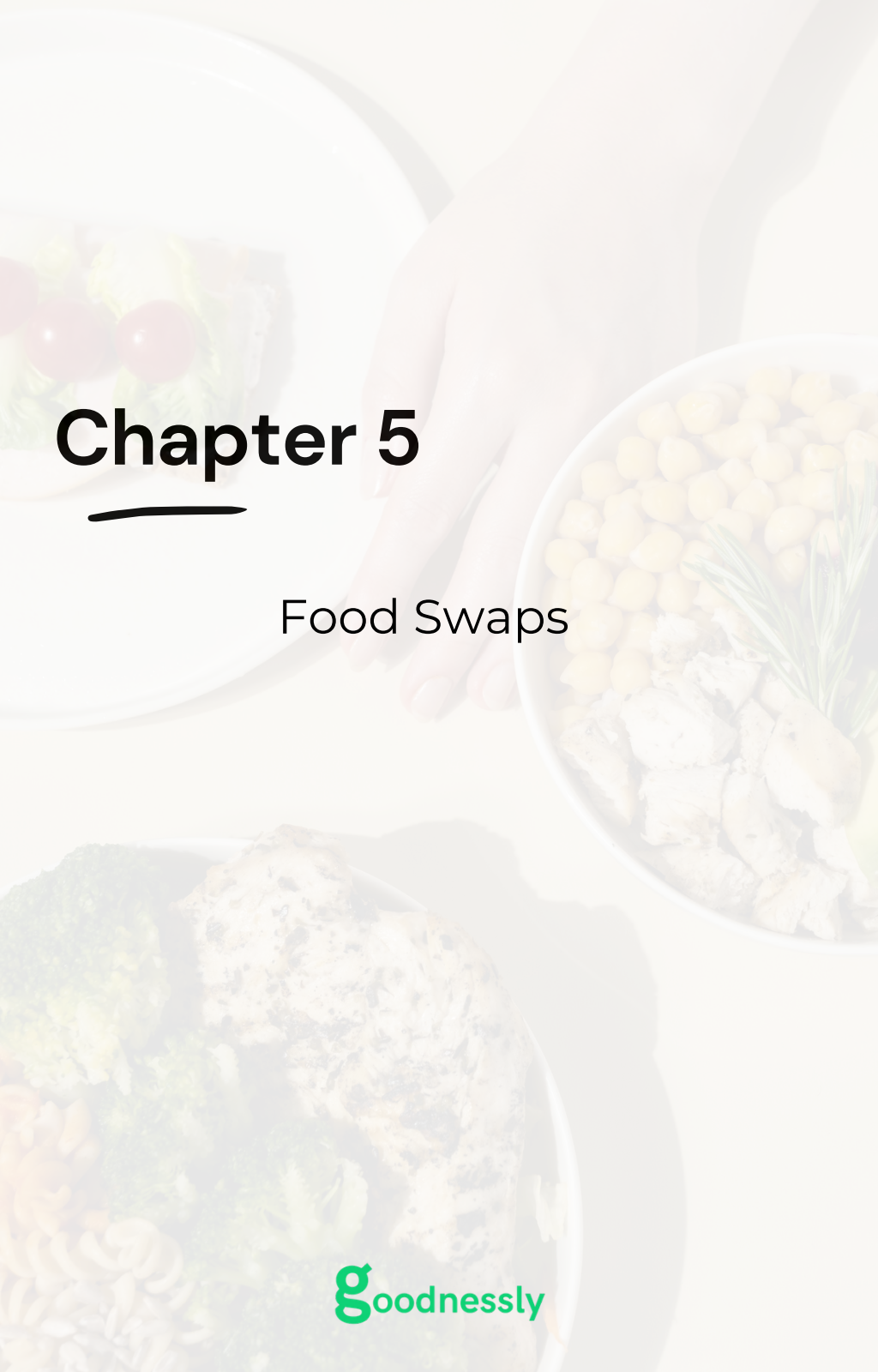
Sodium benzoate is a preservative used to prevent spoilage in acidic foods and beverages. Research suggests sodium benzoate may be linked to hyperactivity and behavioural issues in some children. It may cause allergic reactions or inflammation in sensitive individuals. It is often found in soft drinks, juices, salad dressings and snacks. However, regulatory bodies have approved sodium benzoate for use at specific levels (Walczak-Nowicka & Herbet, 2022).

Artificial Sweeteners

Some research has found associations between artificial sweeteners and chronic diseases including diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. However, regulatory bodies have approved artificial sweeteners for use at specific levels.

Research suggests artificial sweeteners may potentially affect gut health in some individuals, which could influence metabolic health. Individual responses vary, and more research is ongoing. (Swithers, 2015).





Chapter 5

Food Swaps

Food swaps

Consult a registered dietitian for personalized advice.

Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables

If your main source of fibre is through fruits and vegetables, instead of buying canned fruits or vegetables opt for fresh or frozen produce.

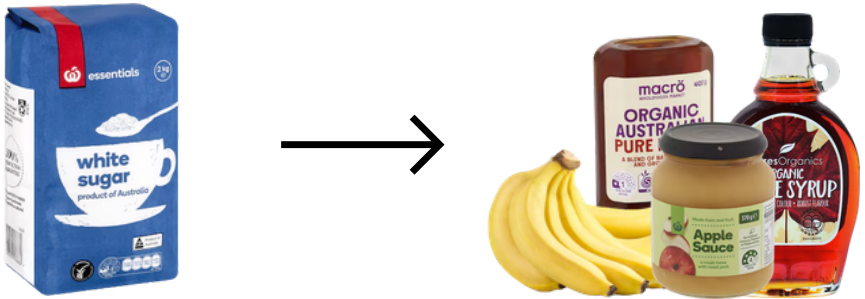


Canned fruits and vegetables may contain preservatives or added sugars. If fresh produce is expensive, opt for frozen fruits and vegetables without added preservatives and additives and contain antioxidants to support a healthy gut (Ringstaff, 2025).



Food swaps

Natural sweeteners instead of sugars



To help support your kids and avoid the sugar rush, instead of using sugars or sweeteners which contain additives, opt for natural sweeteners such as honey, maple syrup, mashed bananas or applesauce in moderation.

These sweeteners can be substituted in baking and incorporated into snacks to sweeten (Ringstaff, 2025).



Food swaps

Breakfast cereals

Some breakfast cereals may contain additives, preservatives, and added sugars while being lower in nutrients and minerals. Choosing high fibre, high protein, and low sugar options can help families reduce additive intake.



Therefore, opting for high fibre, protein and low sugar and saturated fat can help families avoid the sugar rush and help children feel satiated throughout the school day.



Aim to purchase whole foods

But.. what are whole foods?

Whole food are food products that have been **minimally processed**, free from artificial additives and are close to their natural state. They are high in fibre and nutrients to best support a healthy gut (Ringstaff, 2025).

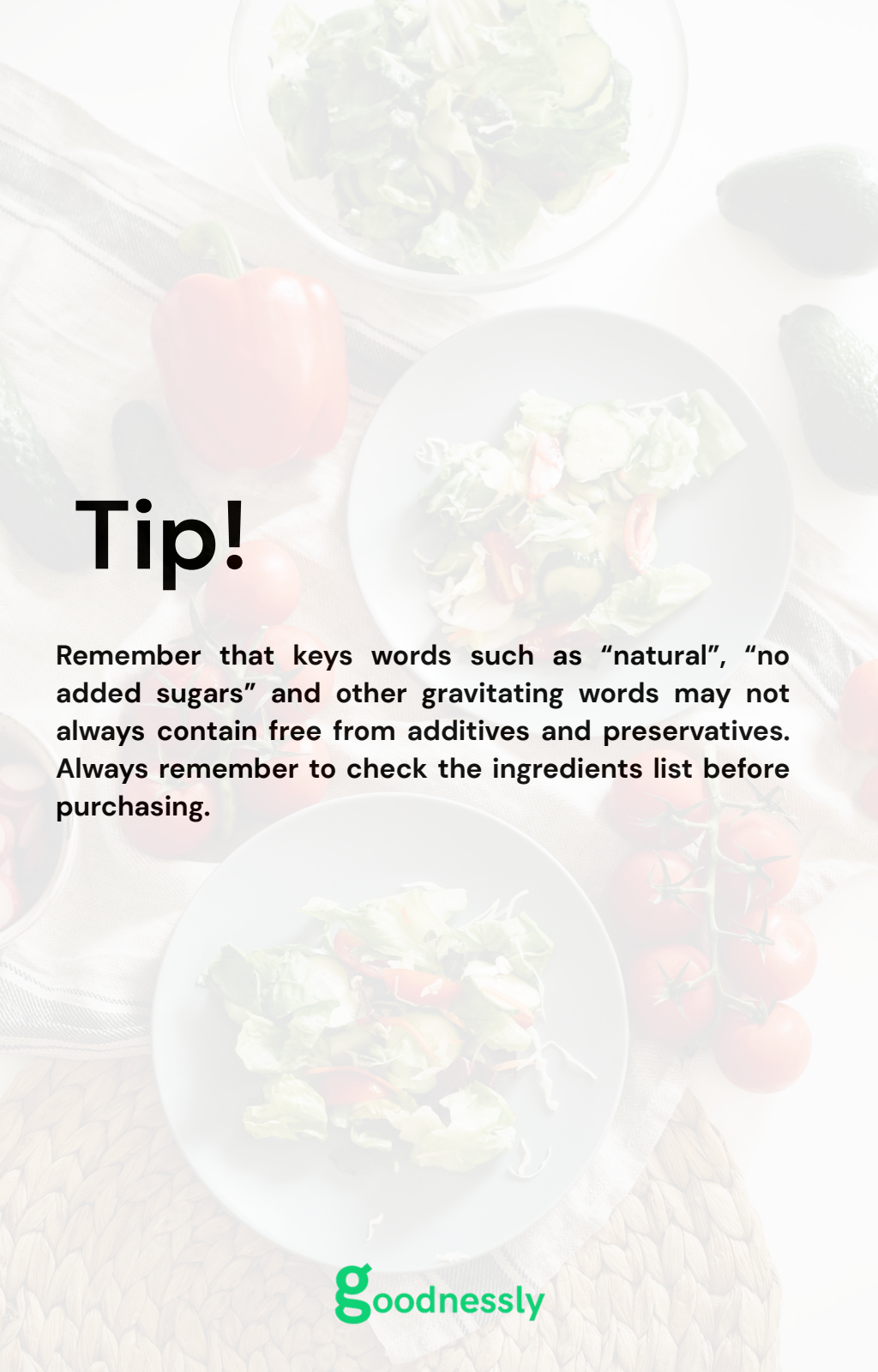
Whole foods:

Fruits and vegetables

Whole grains e.g brown rice, quinoa, oats, and whole wheat products

Animal products e.g fresh meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products free from additives and preservatives.

Legumes e.g beans, lentils and peas without added sugars and preservatives.



Tip!

Remember that key words such as “natural”, “no added sugars” and other gravitating words may not always contain free from additives and preservatives. Always remember to check the ingredients list before purchasing.



The simplest way to avoid food additives and preservatives..

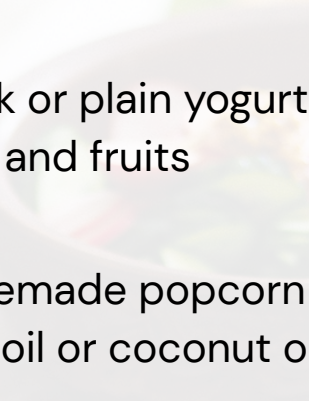
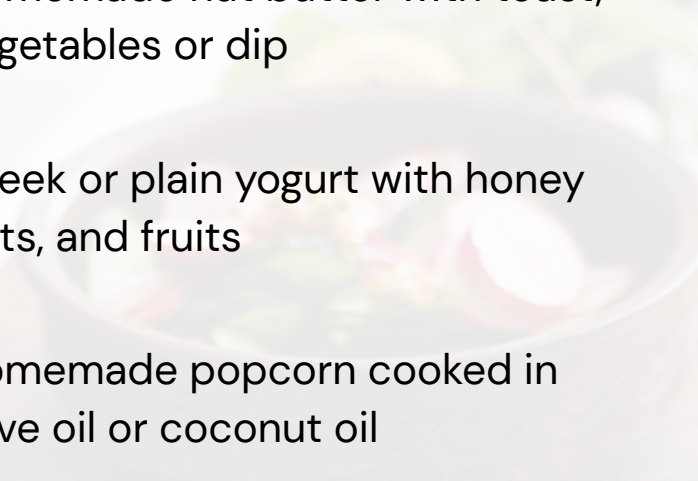
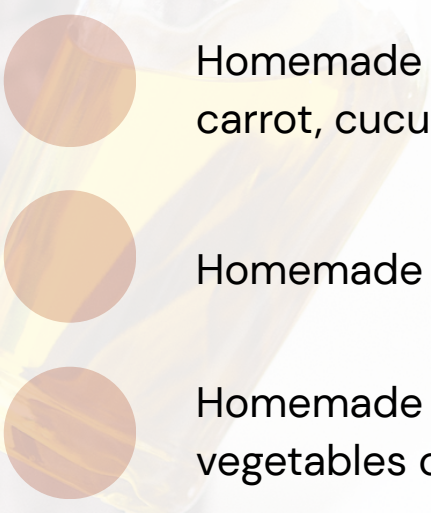
Is creating *your own snacks* and purchasing food products *free* from additives and preservatives.

Here's some homemade snack ideas that only require a few ingredients!

Homemade snacks

Instead of purchasing pre-packaged snacks that often contain additives and preservatives, slowly start to introduce cooking and meal prepping at home for the week ahead.

Here are some snack ideas that only contain a few ingredients:



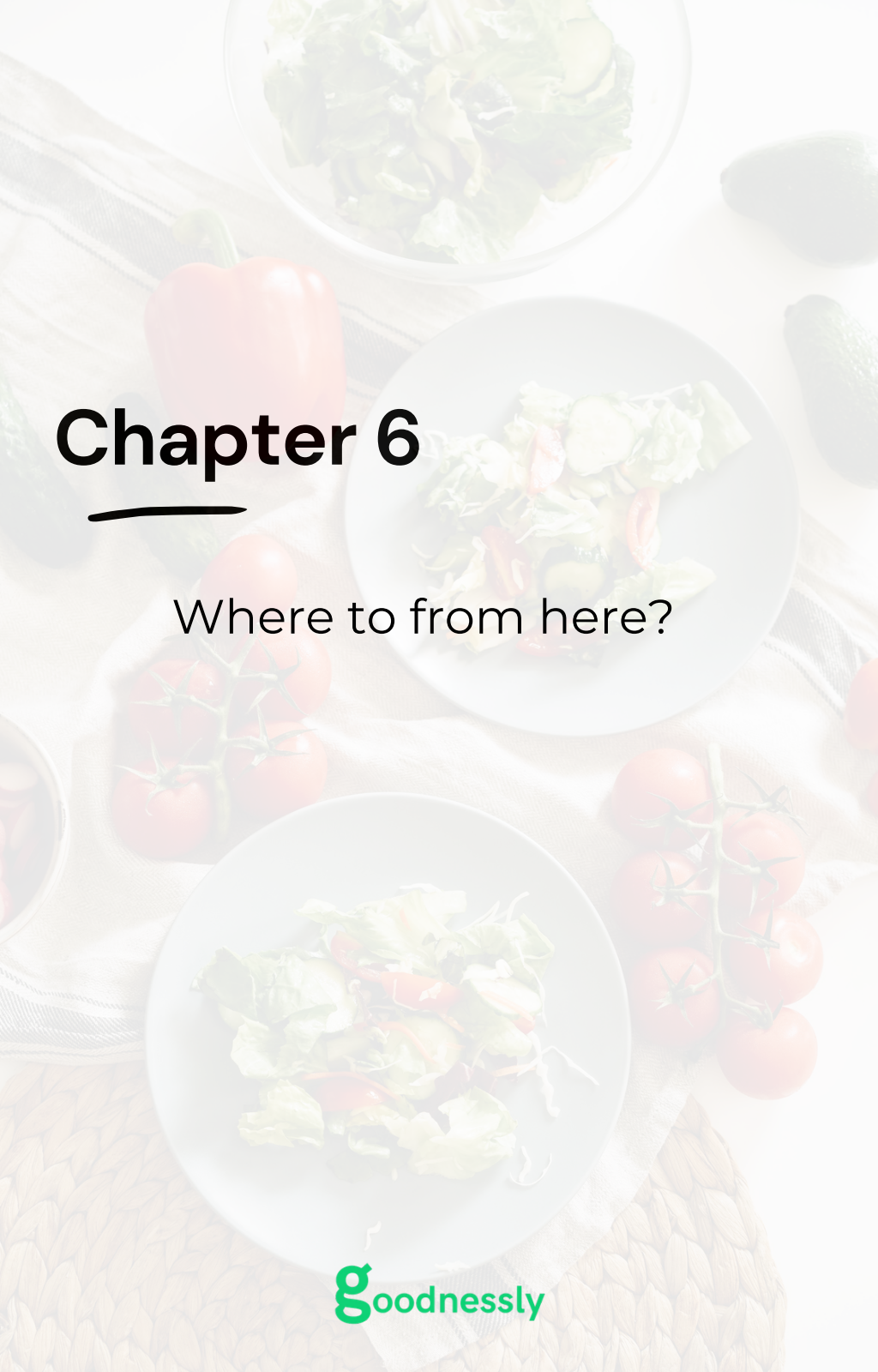
Homemade hummus with
carrot, cucumber and celery

Homemade trail mix or granola

Homemade nut butter with toast,
vegetables or dip

Greek or plain yogurt with honey
nuts, and fruits

Homemade popcorn cooked in
olive oil or coconut oil



Chapter 6

Where to from here?



Continue Your Wellness Journey With Us

This ebook is just the beginning. We're here to support you every step of the way as you navigate nutrition, wellness, and creating a healthier life for your family.

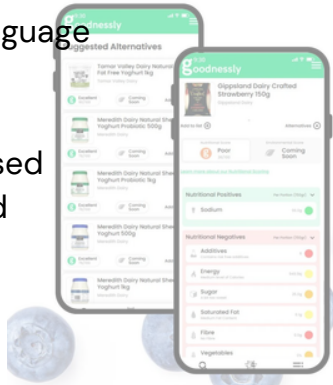
Here's how we can help:

Goodnessly Free App

Stop guessing what's in your food.

Scan any product barcode and instantly see:

- Additives and E-numbers flagged
- Ingredient breakdowns in plain language
- Nutritional scores at a glance
- Healthier alternatives suggested
- Shopping lists to keep you organised
- Download free on iOS and Android

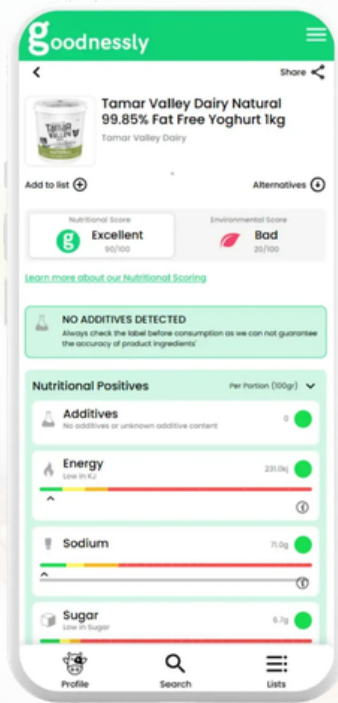


Download here





If you're unsure about a product, you can use the Goodnessly app to **search brands** and help identify food additives and allergens in food products.



What is Goodnessly?

This free app allows you to **scan barcodes**, search food products and **receive instant information** about food additives and the nutritional information about any product.

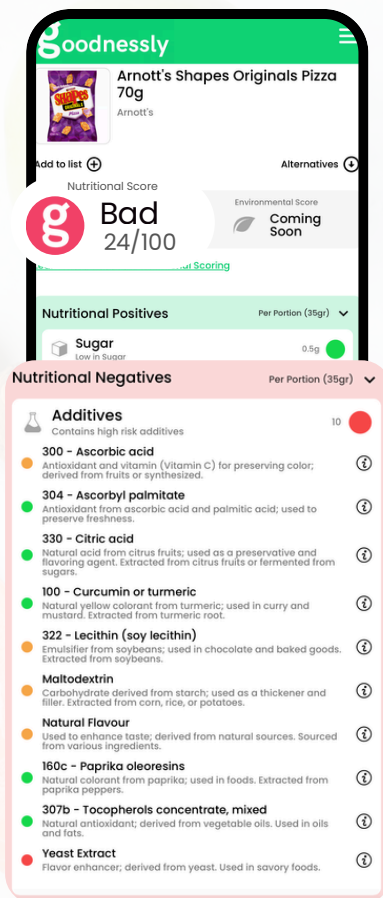
Download here





Simply download the app from your apple or android app store.

1. Scan a barcode or search a product
2. The Goodnesslly App will highlight any nasty ingredients, compare products and find alternative products for you.
3. Our pro version has a built in additive checker to look up e-numbers on the go



What's the story behind goodnesslly?

Goodnesslly was developed by a mum watching her child struggling with neurodiversity and unhealthy behaviours. After realising that nutrition made a huge difference to his life, she set out to make it easier for other parents to find products with better, cleaner ingredients.



Gut healthy recipe books in our collection

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Conclusion

First, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to read this. Thank you for asking questions about what's in your food. That matters more than you know.

Here's the truth: you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to eliminate every additive or overhaul your pantry overnight. Small changes add up. One swap at a time. One label read at a time. One conversation with your kids about food at a time.

Food additives are everywhere—they preserve, enhance, and make food convenient. That's not going away. But now you know what to look for. You know which additives concern you most. You know you have choices.

Start where you are. Pick one product your family eats regularly and find a healthier alternative. Then another. Build momentum, not perfection. Your family's health isn't about getting it all right—it's about getting it better, one choice at a time.

You've got this. And you've got Goodnessly in your corner.

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