

Family Friendly Factsheets!

Functional Foods!



Over the last few years there has been a rise in the number of foods calling their selves “functional foods”. Functional foods are foods which are advertised as having certain health effects.

What are Functional Foods?

Functional foods are ordinary foods that have ingredients which have been included into them to give them a specific medical or physical benefit.

There are many functional food products available these include yogurts, drinks, cereals, and bread with some meat and fish products. The most popular functional foods are yogurts which contain helpful bacteria.

Functional foods first emerged in Japan, where many products are now available.

Functional ingredients are known as a food ingredient that has a positive effect on the body and consumed over time can give reason for health claims. This means that foods containing certain ingredients have health promoting properties over and above their nutritional value.

Functional foods are a very broad range of products ranging from food made from a particular functional ingredient e.g. margarine or actual food items such as and breakfast cereals which are fortified with folic acid.

There are many different types of functional foods. One of the most popular is pre and pro biotic drinks / yoghurts.

Pre-biotic

These are substances that help growth of certain bacteria within the gut. A prebiotic is a “non-digestible food ingredient that usefully affects the body by encouraging the growth and activity of bacteria in the large intestine, which can improve the bodies health”.

Pro-biotic

This product contains live bacteria that have useful effects on the body by improving its gut health. Pro-biotics are found in fermented milk products and yogurts.

All functional foods should be marked on their own advantages. It is important that evidence exists to support the health claims made including evidence that eating foods has a positive effect on the body.

Consumption of Functional Foods

It is possible to achieve the required level of intake of the functional food or ingredient within your daily lives.

Functional foods do provide health benefits, but it is important to remember that they shouldn't be seen as an alternative to a varied balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle.

To increase health and well being it is important to avoid smoking, take plenty of exercise and a varied balanced diet. Functional foods are not a miracle solution to health problems but may be useful to some people as part of a healthy balanced diet and lifestyle.

The rules around Functional foods

The UK Food Safety Act 1990, has made it a crime to falsely describe a food or to mislead what the food actually is for example making a claim that a food can benefit health without there being evidence to back it up.

There are also controls around the food labeling regulations. It is important that food labeling is not misleading so that you, the consumer, can understand it. It has been made illegal to say “prevents” and “treats” or “cures” a disease. However health claims such as “can aid digestion”, are allowed, if they are true and do not mislead the consumer.