

# Excipients: the inactive ingredients in medicines

**This leaflet provides information on the excipients in medicines.**

**It does not replace talking with your doctor, pharmacist or other health professional about your medicine.**

## What are excipients?

Medicines contain active and inactive ingredients (excipients). Examples of excipients added to medicines include:

- oils or alcohols to help the active ingredient dissolve
- fillers or binding ingredients to make a tablet's shape and size
- sweeteners to improve the taste
- preservatives to make the medicine last longer.

## Some people need to avoid some excipients

Some excipients in medicines can make some people with allergies, intolerances or medical conditions unwell. For example, people with:

- anaphylaxis (a life-threatening allergic reaction) to peanuts, soya or sesame should avoid medicines containing peanut oil (also called Arachis oil), soya or sesame oil
- coeliac disease should avoid gluten
- phenylketonuria should avoid aspartame and phenylalanine
- galactosemia or lactose intolerance should avoid lactose
- diabetes should limit the amount of sugar they eat or drink.

Some excipients are made from animal products, which vegetarians, vegans or people of a particular faith may want to avoid.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you have concerns about the contents of your medicine.

## Labelling requirements

Because some excipients in medicines can make some people unwell, Medsafe requires medicine manufacturers to list them on the medicine packaging. Table 1 below shows the excipients that must be labelled on the medicine package.

**Table 1: Excipients (inactive ingredients) that must be declared on medicine labels**

Antibiotics	Lactose	Sodium salts
Aspartame	Milk/milk products	Sorbic acid/sorbic acid salts
Benzoates	Peanuts/peanut products	Soya bean/soya bean products
Crustacea/crustacean products	Phenylalanine	Sucralose
Egg/egg products	Pollen	Sugar alcohols
Ethanol	Potassium salts	Sugars
Fish/fish products	Propolis	Sulphites
Galactose	Royal jelly	Tartrazine
Gluten	Saccharin	Tree nuts/tree nut products
Hydroxybenzoic acid esters	Sesame/sesame seed products	

## How do I find out which excipients are in my medicine?

### Medicine box or packaging

The excipients listed in Table 1 above will be on the medicine packaging. If the medicine container is small, the warning statement will be on the information leaflet inside the container instead.

### Consumer medicine information (CMI)

If there is a CMI for your medicine, excipients are listed in the 'Ingredients' section near the end. You can search for the CMI on the Medsafe website:

[medsafe.govt.nz/DbSearch/infoSearch](https://medsafe.govt.nz/DbSearch/infoSearch)

### Data sheet (prescribing information)

The medicine data sheet (prescribing information) lists the excipients in the 'Pharmaceutical Particulars' section near the end. You can search for the data sheet on the Medsafe website:

[medsafe.govt.nz/DbSearch/infoSearch](https://medsafe.govt.nz/DbSearch/infoSearch)

### Product/Application search

If your medicine does not have a CMI or a data sheet, you can use Medsafe's Product/Application search:

[medsafe.govt.nz/DbSearch/](https://medsafe.govt.nz/DbSearch/)

- Enter the medicine's brand name in the 'Trade name' box. Click on the relevant search result to view the excipients in that medicine.
- To find out which medicines contain any excipient – enter the excipient in the 'Ingredient' box. The search results list all the medicines containing that excipient.

### Contact the pharmaceutical company

There may be some information about your medicine that only the pharmaceutical company can provide. This may include:

- ingredients within a flavour or colour
- manufacturing impurities or contaminants
- components of an ingredient (such as caffeine in a natural health product)
- the source of an ingredient (such as whether it is of animal origin).

Look for the company contact details on the medicine packaging, or in the data sheet, CMI or Product/Application search.

### More information

- Healthify – 'Inactive ingredients in medicines', available at: [healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/e/excipients-in-medicines](https://healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/e/excipients-in-medicines)
- Allergy New Zealand – 'Food allergy or food intolerance', available at: [allergy.org.nz/conditions/food-allergies/allergy-vs-intolerance/](https://allergy.org.nz/conditions/food-allergies/allergy-vs-intolerance/)