

Unilever's Nutrition Standards



Unilever

Introduction

Unilever's Nutrition Standards are two internally developed sets of standards for portfolio improvement: Unilever's Science-based Nutrition Criteria (USNC) for reducing nutrients to limit, and the Positive Nutrition Standards (PNS), which address recommended ingredients and nutrients in line with dietary recommendations for a healthy, sustainable diet. The standards are regularly updated to stay aligned with scientific developments and to drive product reformulation.

In 2003, Unilever was the first company to implement a self-developed nutrient profiling system under the Nutrition Enhancement Programme (NEP). Aligned with WHO's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, we aimed to evaluate and improve the nutritional quality of our portfolio. This involved developing product standards that focussed on energy, sodium, sugars, saturated fat and trans fat ([Nijman et al. EJCNC 2007](#)). To develop the standards, we translated WHO global guidelines for daily intake into product group-specific nutrient standards, considering the role of the product in the diet, including appropriate serving size and frequency of consumption. Since 2010, the Highest Nutrition Standards (HNS), evolved from the NEP, guided the company's (re)formulation agenda and related commitments.

In 2020, Unilever undertook a comprehensive review of its standards. Recognising the high prevalence of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies^{1 2 3} and the potential impact of a shift towards more sustainable plant-forward diets, we broadened the scope beyond updating our standards on nutrients to limit. We also introduced a new set of standards to increase amounts of ingredients and nutrients with a positive health impact.

This resulted in two sets of standards: Unilever's Science-based Nutrition Criteria (USNC) and Positive Nutrition Standards (PNS). Both USNC and PNS are based on guidelines of international health authorities (Tables 1 & 2), which are translated into product group standards (Figures 1 & 2; Table 4 & 5). The USNC and PNS are two independent sets of standards, meaning that compliance to nutrients to limit and positives are assessed separately to avoid compensation.

Scientific modelling, using national food consumption data of United Kingdom, France, United States, Brazil and China, has shown that reformulation of food products towards USNC would reduce average population intakes of these nutrients by up to 21% for energy, 24% for sodium, 30% for saturated fat, 32% for added sugars and 22% for total sugars. Moreover, reformulation would bring intakes of these nutrients closer to the referenced WHO guidelines. We have published these findings in the peer-reviewed journal *Nutrients* ([Dotsch-Klerk et al. Nutrients 2022](#)). We also modelled the impact of PNS using data from the United States and showed that applying PNS could increase mean population intakes by 30% for fibre, more than 50% for

¹ Collaborators GBD. Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the global burden of disease study 2017. *Lancet*. (2019) 393:1958–72. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30041-8

² Willett W, Rockström J, Loken B, Springmann M, Lang T, Vermeulen S, et al. Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–lancet commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *Lancet*. (2019) 393:447–92. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4

³ Stevens GA, Beal T, Mbuya MNN, Luo H, Neufeld LM, Addo OY, et al. Micronutrient deficiencies among preschool-aged children and women of reproductive age worldwide: a pooled analysis of individual-level data from population-representative surveys. *Lancet Glob Health*. (2022) 10:e1590–9. doi:10.1016/S2214-109X(22)00367-9

vegetables and even double the intake of whole grains. The findings were published in the peer-reviewed journal *Frontiers in Nutrition* (Dotsch-Klerk et al. *Front. Nutr* 2023).

Unilever Nutrient Profiling principles

To ensure our reformulation standards are an effective and credible instrument to help create better diets, a set of global principles were taken into account when setting the standards:

- Encourage innovation and reformulation of our Foods products
- Be scientifically sound and reflect internationally accepted dietary guidelines
- Address nutrients and/or ingredients internationally recognised as relevant for improving public health
- Be all inclusive, with product group specific standards for all product groups
- Be stretching and realistic, considering the role of the product in the diet and maintaining taste and enjoyment for our consumers

Reference values used in standards setting

Unilever's Nutrition Standards are firmly grounded in science and international dietary guidelines. We translated the recommendations from WHO and CODEX references into specific standards for each product group (Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1. Reference values used for USNC

Nutrient	Reference value	Reference
Energy	Women: 2000 kcal/day Men: 2500 kcal/day	FAO/WHO. Joint FAO/WHO/UNU Expert Consultation. Human Energy Requirements; FAO: Rome, Italy, 2001.
Saturated fat (SAFA)	10 en% ~ 20g/day*	WHO Guideline. Saturated fatty acid and trans-fatty acid intake for adults and children. WHO: Geneva, Switzerland, 2023.
Sodium	5 salt/day = 2000 mg sodium/day	WHO Guideline: Sodium intake for adults and children. WHO: Geneva, Switzerland, 2012.
Free sugars	10 en% = 50g/day*	WHO. Guideline: Sugars intake for adults and children. WHO: Geneva, Switzerland, 2015.
Trans fat (TFA)	1 en% ~ 2 g/day iTFA ≤ 2g/100g fat	WHO Guideline. Saturated fatty acid and trans-fatty acid intake for adults and children. WHO: Geneva, Switzerland, 2023.

*assuming a 2000 kcal diet, in line with GDA/DV labelling on-pack

Table 2. Reference values used for PNS

Fruit & Vegetables	400g (i.e., five portions of 80g) of fruit and vegetables per day	Healthy diet (who.int)
Wholegrain	8g per serve	The Whole Grains Council
Dairy (only for kids products)	25g per 100g	Cow's Milk and Milk Alternatives CDC
Protein	10% or 20% of NRV per 100g	Codex Nutrition and Health Claims (CAC/GL 23-1997)
Fibre	3g per 100g	Codex Nutrition and Health Claims (CAC/GL 23-1997)
Omega 3	0.3 g alpha-linolenic acid per 100g and per 100 kcal	Regulation (EU) No 1047/2012
Micronutrients Vitamins: A, C, B2, Folate, B12, D, E Minerals: Calcium, Iodine, Iron, Magnesium, Potassium, Zinc	15% of NRV per 100g/100ml (solids/liquid foods) 7.5g of NRV per 100ml (beverages)	Codex Nutrition and Health Claims (CAC/GL 23-1997)

*References for global portfolio. Products sold in China⁴, Europe⁵ and USA⁶ are scored according to local regulation

⁴ [标签标准 \(nfi.or.th\)](#)

⁵ [Nutrition claims \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶ [Food Labelling Guide \(fda.gov\)](#)

Approach to setting standards

For both USNC (Figure 1) and PNS (Figure 2), a similar approach was used to set the standards:

- I. Dietary guidelines were used as a starting point
- II. Nutrients were selected
- III. Criteria were set by product group
- IV. IV Impact was modelled using food intake data

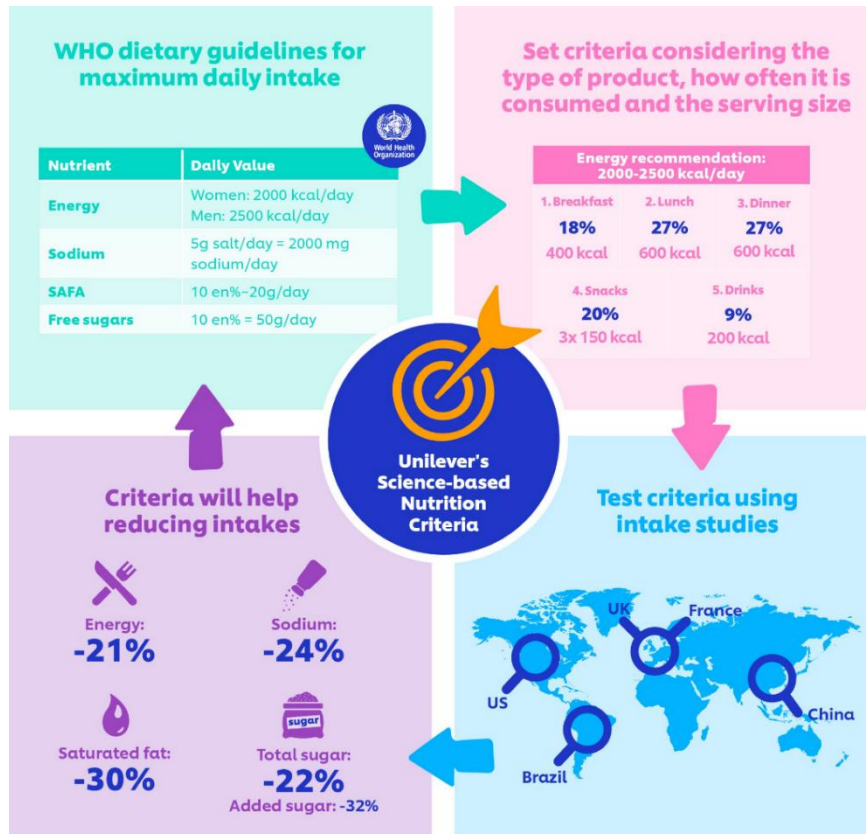


Figure 1. Development & evaluation of USNC



Figure 2. Development & evaluation of PNS

Product groups

For USNC and PNS, we translated international dietary recommendations into product category-specific standards for all product groups in our portfolio (Table 3). We grouped products considering the following:

- Product composition
- Role of each product in the diet and consumption occasion, including frequency of consumption
- Product serving size, bearing in mind balanced portions

Table 3. Unilever's product groups

PRODUCT GROUP	DESCRIPTION
MEALS	
Main Meals	Products which are or are used to prepare a main meal. A main meal consists of at least 2/3 of the following components: carbohydrate, protein, vegetable/fruit
Small Meals	Products consumed as an in between meal and on occasion used to replace a main meal or in diets consisting of several small meals a day
MEAL COMPONENT	
Cereals	Cereals usually prepared with water, milk, yoghurt or dairy alternatives
Bread Products	All types of breads or substitutes of bread
Spreads - Sweet & Savoury	Products spread onto foods such as bread and crackers
Carbohydrate-based Dishes	Products eaten as part of a main meal with at least 70% carbohydrates
Animal Protein	Products intended as the protein component of a meal containing animal protein (e.g. meat, fish, insects)
Plant Protein	Products intended as the protein component of a meal containing plant-based protein
Soups	Soups eaten on all occasions
Pickled & Fermented Vegetables	Fruits & vegetables preserved in a salt brine or vinegar or through fermentation
Meal Sauces	Sauces with a serving size >35g
TASTEMAKERS & COOKING AIDS	
Water-based Sauces	Sauces used in small quantities as an accompaniment to a meal (serving<35g) without an emulsifying agent and with a fat content <10% w/w
Emulsion-based Sauces & Cooking Fats	Sauces with an emulsifying agent, used in small quantities as an accompaniment to a meal (serving<35g), and oils & other fat-based products used during preparation or at the table
Mustards	Products made from mustard seeds or with >40% mustard
Liquid Bouillons & seasonings	Bouillons and seasonings <u>with multipurpose application</u> that are sold in liquid, jelly or paste format
Universal Bouillons & Seasonings	<u>Multipurpose</u> bouillons cubes/powders and seasonings sprinkled in small amounts
Dish Specific Bouillons & Seasonings	Bouillons & seasonings (any format) <u>with a single dish application</u> by design or validated by consumer data. Preparation instructions on-pack
Toppings - Sweet & Savoury	A garnish placed on top of a food or dish for flavour or decoration
Cooking & Baking Agents	Binders, cooking & baking ingredients
TREATS & SNACKS	
Ice Cream & Desserts	Ice cream, water/fruit ices, sorbet, and frozen or ambient desserts
Snacks - Sweet & Savoury	Smaller sized sweet or savoury products consumed as a treat or snack in between meals
Kids Ice Cream & Desserts	Ice cream, water/fruit ices, sorbet, frozen or ambient desserts, designed for consumption by children (6-12 years old)
Kids Snacks - Sweet & Savoury	Smaller sized sweet or savoury products consumed as a treat or snack in between meals, designed for consumption by children (6-12 years old)
BEVERAGES	
RTD & Concentrated Beverages	Ice tea, milk tea, coffee premixes, squash, slush and flavoured water, sold as RTD or concentrated format
Leaf Tea, Herbal Infusions & Coffee	Dry leaf, herbal infusions and coffee powder
Fruit & Vegetable Juices	Beverages that are intended to be consumed as a juice-based beverage and primarily consist of fruit or vegetable derivatives/components (e.g. juice, puree, pulp)
Cereal & Malt-based Beverages	All cereal- or malt-based products to be used as beverages
OTHERS	
All other products	Products that don't fit under any of the other product groups

Application and use of the standards

Unilever's Nutrition Standards, USNC (Table 4) and PNS (Table 5), apply to our entire portfolio, across all products, regions and brands. These standards guide our continuous portfolio improvement through innovation and reformulation. They also play a key role in evaluating Nutrition & Health Claims, product fortification and aligning with our Principles on Responsible Food & Beverage Marketing. Additionally, they are incorporated in our Healthy Recipe Framework used in recipes on pack and online, as well as of our branded healthy eating programmes and campaigns.

Table 4. Unilever's Science-based Nutrition Criteria (USNC)

Product role	Product group	Energy	Sodium	SAFA	Added Sugar	TFA
Meals	Main Meals	600 kcal/serving	250 mg/100g	1.5 g/100g	1.25 g/100g	
	Small Meals	400 kcal/serving	250 mg/100g	1.5 g/100g	1.25 g/100g	
Meal components	Cereals	NA	375 mg/100g	2 g/100g	20g/100g	PHVO: 1 g/100g product iTFA: 2 g /100g total fat
	Bread Products	NA	375 mg/100g	1 g/100g	4g/100g	
	Spreads - Sweet & Savoury	NA	720 mg/100g	10g/100g	17g/100g	
	Carbohydrate-based Dishes	300 kcal/serving	250 mg/100g	1.5 g/100g	1 g/100g	
	Animal Protein	300 kcal/serving	675 mg/100g	5 g/100g	1 g/100g	
	Plant Protein	300 kcal/serving	450 mg/100g	3 g/100g	2.5 g/100g	
	Soups	NA	265 mg/100g	1.5 g/100g	1 g/100g	
	Meal Sauces	NA	340 mg/100g	2 g/100g	2.5 g/100g	
Tastemaker & cooking aids	Pickled & Fermented Vegetables	NA	1000 mg/100g	NA	8 g/100g	
	Water-based Sauces	NA	750 mg/100g	NA	17 g/100g	
	Emulsion-based Sauces & Cooking Fats	NA	750 mg/100g	18% total fat	7 g/100g	
	Mustards	NA	2000 mg/100g	18% total fat	7 g/100g	
	Dish Specific Bouillons & Seasonings	NA	265 mg/100g	1.5 g/100g	1 g/100g	
	Liquid & Paste Bouillons & Seasonings	NA	4000 mg/100g	NA	40 g/100g	
	Universal Bouillons & Seasonings	NA	24,000 mg/100g	NA	20 g/100g	
	Toppings - Sweet & Savoury	NA	1250 mg/100g	12.5 g/100g	17 g/100g	
	Cooking & Baking Agents	NA	1250 mg/100g	12.5 g/100g	31 g/100g	

Product role	Product group	Energy	Sodium	SAFA	Total Sugar	TFA
Treats & snacks	Ice-cream & Desserts	150 kcal/serving	NA	5 g/serving	12 g/serving	PHVO: 1 g/100g product iTFA: 2 g /100g total fat
	Snacks - Sweet & Savoury	150 kcal/serving	300 mg/serving	3 g/serving	12 g/serving	
	Kids Ice-cream & Desserts	110 kcal/serving	NA	3 g/serving	12 g/serving	
	Kids Snacks - Sweet & Savoury	110 kcal/serving	300 mg/serving	3 g/serving	12 g/serving	
Beverages	RTD & Concentrated Beverages	NA	NA	1 g/100g or ml	5 g/100g or ml	
	Leaf Teas & Herbal Infusions	NA	NA	NA	No added sugar allowed	
	Fruit Juices	NA	NA	NA	No added sugar allowed	
	Cereal & Malt-based Beverages	NA	NA	1g/100g	6 g/100g	

Product role	Product group	Energy	Sodium	SAFA	Added Sugar	TFA
NA	All Other Products	NA	100 mg/100g	1 g/100g	2.5 g/100g	PHVO: 1 g/100g product iTFA: 2 g /100g total fat

Unilever's Science-based Nutrition Criteria apply to the entire Unilever portfolio from 2023.

Products should be scored 'as consumed', meaning as sold or as prepared depending on format.

Table 5. Positive Nutrition Standards (PNS)

Product Group	Micronutrients*	Vegetables & Fruit	Protein	Fibre	Wholegrain	Dairy	Omega 3	
Plant Protein	Solids or liquid foods: 15% RDA/serve Beverages: ≥7.5% RDA per 100g or ml	80g/serve	10g /100 g		NA	NA	NA	
Soups								
Main Meals		30g/serve	5g /100 g or 2.5g/100ml		8g/serve			
Small Meals								
Cereals					NA			
Bread products								
Carbohydrate-based Dishes		25%	3g/100g or 1.5g/100kcal	3g/100g or 1.5g/100kcal	8g/serve	25%	0,3 g ALA/100g	
Meal sauces								
Fruit & vegetable Juices								
Mustards								
All other products								
Ice cream & desserts								
Snacks - Sweet & savoury								
Kids Ice cream & desserts								
Kids snacks - sweet & savoury								
Emulsion based sauces & cooking fats								
Spreads - Sweet & savoury								
Water based sauces								
RTD & Concentrated Beverages								
Cereal & Malt-based beverages								
Pickled & fermented vegetables								
Liquid Bouillons & Seasonings								
Universal Bouillons & Seasonings								
Dish Specific Bouillons & Seasonings								
Toppings - Sweet & savoury								
Cooking & baking agents								
Leaf Teas, Herbal Infusions & Coffee								
Animal Protein	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	

Positive Nutrition Standards apply to the entire Unilever portfolio from 2021.

No standards are in scope for Animal Protein product group in alignment with Unilever strategy to encourage more sustainable healthy plant-based diets.

Regardless of products format, all products are scored as sold (including rehydration factors) to only count the ingredients and nutrients contained in our products and do not count the ingredients and nutrients added by consumers and chefs.