

The sugar words on Canadian food labels

In Canada, sugar claims on a package carry precise meanings, and this sheet sums up each one in a single sentence so you can read the label in the grocery aisle with the slogan set aside.

Sugar-free (“sugarless”)

A specific amount of the food has less than 0.5 g of sugar or less than 5 calories, which does not by itself make it a healthy choice.

Source: Unlock Food

No added sugar (“no sugar added”)

The food must not contain any added sugar, although naturally occurring sugars, such as those from fruit or milk, may still be present.

Sources: Unlock Food, CFIA

Unsweetened

Stricter than “no added sugar,” it means the food has neither added sugars nor sweeteners such as aspartame, sucralose or permitted sugar alcohols.

Sources: Unlock Food, CFIA

Reduced in sugar (“lower in sugar”)

Compared with a similar product, the food has 25% less sugar per serving, which makes it a comparison rather than a promise that the food is low in sugar.

Source: Unlock Food

Low in sugars

This regulated claim is separate from “reduced in sugar,” and its criteria sit in the claims table that CFIA refers to, so the surest check is still the Sugars grams in the Nutrition Facts table.

Source: CFIA

Sugars (Nutrition Facts table)

The Sugars line shows total sugars in grams and as a % Daily Value without separating natural from added sugars, because Canadian labels have no “added sugars” line.

Sources: CFIA, Unlock Food

The “-ose” aliases

In the ingredient list, added sugar travels under other names such as glucose-fructose, dextrose, maltose, honey, maple syrup or concentrated fruit juice, and an ingredient ending in “ose” is likely a sugar.

Source: Unlock Food

HIGH IN SUGARS Front-of-package symbol

Since January 1, 2026, prepackaged foods that reach the set threshold for sugars (or for sodium or saturated fat) must carry this symbol unless exempt, but a package without it is not necessarily low in sugar.

Source: CFIA

Worth knowing: when a package carries the “High in sugars” symbol, “reduced in sugars” is the only sugar claim CFIA still allows on the main panel, and packages made before 2026 may still be on store shelves.

Updated October 2026. An educational sheet, not medical advice or compliance advice for manufacturers; the package in your hand and the official sources always take precedence.

Sources: Unlock Food (Dietitians of Canada), “What You Need to Know About Sugar”; Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), sugars claim requirements and the November 17, 2025 notice to industry on the front-of-package nutrition symbol.

Full dictionary, with links to every source: sugaredkiller.com/labels/sugar-claims/

Version française : sugaredkiller.com/fr/labels/sugar-claims/