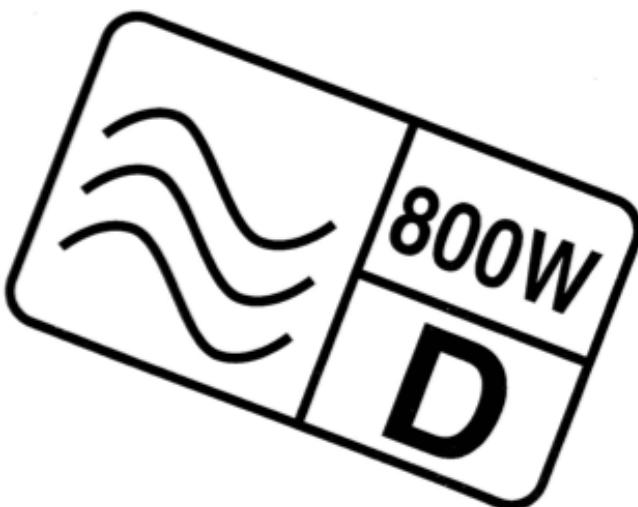


# THE NEW MICROWAVE LABELS



A Guide from the Food Safety Directorate  
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food



## Microwave Labelling

For centuries people have cooked food to make it more palatable, easier to digest and to kill bacteria should any be present.

Microwave ovens now make it possible to heat food much faster than by traditional methods, but this means that sometimes it is more difficult for the user to determine the required cooking time accurately. This is particularly so for smaller quantities of food such as prepared ready meals.

Many visually impaired and elderly people find that the convenience of a microwave oven far outweighs the effort needed to understand and operate its controls properly.

To help consumers microwave food more successfully, a new voluntary labelling scheme for ovens and food packs was introduced in 1992. This has been developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in partnership with oven and food manufacturers, retailers and consumer organisations.

The new labels on ovens and food packs help you set the right heating time. The oven label shows the microwave symbol, the power output (in watts) and heating category. The label on packaged, microwave-ready food shows the heating time for different powers and heating

## ~~ The Labelling Scheme

The labelling scheme is displayed on most new ovens purchased after early 1992. For information on older ovens, see the section headed 'Any Questions?'

### The oven label

From 1992, the front of most new domestic microwave ovens will display a label which will tie in with new labels on food packs. Matching the information on the food pack with that on the oven will give the heating time needed.

The oven label, an example of which is given, will show three important pieces of information:

**Triple Wave sign** = microwave symbol

**Figure (e.g. 800W)** = the power output (watts)

**Letter (e.g. D)** = the heating category for small packs

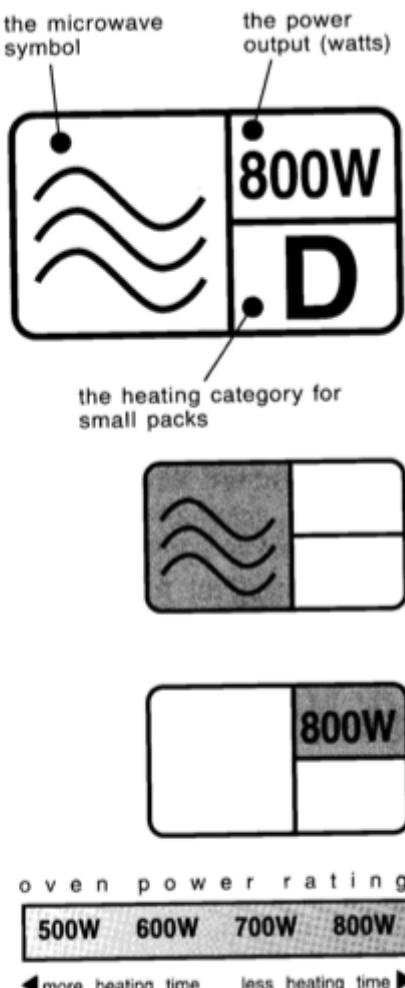
### The microwave symbol

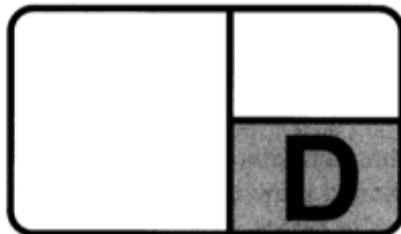
The microwave symbol – the triple wave sign – shows that the oven has been labelled in compliance with the new scheme.

### The power output

The figure in this box shows the power output of the oven, in watts, based on an internationally agreed standard (IEC 705).

If your oven is rated 600W it will heat food faster than a 500W oven, but not as fast as a 700W oven.





heating category for small packs



◀more heating time      less heating time▶

### The heating category

In this box, there will be a letter. This is the heating category, based on the oven's ability to heat small food packs.

Instructions on food packs up to 500 g are likely to be given in terms of these letters.

If your oven is category **B** it will heat up small portions of food faster than a category **A** oven but not as fast as a category **C** oven.

Page 10 explains in greater detail how the power output and the heating category have been worked out.

### The food pack label

Most packaged foods suitable for microwaving will be marked with the microwave symbol and appropriate instructions for heating. An illustration of a type of layout to be used for instructions on food packs is given below.

For ovens marked with a heating category, select the appropriate time or times for your oven. For other ovens, refer to timings given for oven wattage. When using ovens of different power, heating time must be increased or decreased accordingly.

**IMPORTANT** – Always check the food is piping hot throughout before serving.

 **TO MICROWAVE**

For ovens marked with a heating category, select appropriate time(s) for your oven. For other ovens, refer to timings given for oven wattage. When using ovens of a different power, heating time must be increased or decreased accordingly. Always check that the food is piping hot before serving.

heating category	oven wattage	
B	D	650W      750W
6	5	5      4
minutes		minutes

### **Using heating category instructions**

- In the illustration the information is given for **B** and **D** ovens only.
- For **C** ovens, choose the time midway between **B** and **D**, in this case 5½ minutes.
- For **A** ovens, it will be necessary to heat the food for a little longer than the time given for **B** ovens, in this case 6½ minutes.
- For **E** ovens, use a slightly shorter heating time than specified for **D** ovens, in this case 4½ minutes.

Please note, when comparing different models of ovens, that the heating categories and power outputs are independent. Thus ovens with the highest power output may not be in the highest heating category.

**After heating always check that the food is piping hot throughout.**

### **Using oven wattage instructions**

In the above example information is given for 650W and 750W ovens. For ovens with a wattage lower than 650W heat for a longer time, for example a 550W oven will need approximately 6 minutes. For ovens with a wattage higher than 750W heat for a slightly shorter time, for example an 850W oven will need approximately 3 minutes.

**After heating always check that the food is piping hot throughout.**

### **Foodline**

If you need further help to understand the instructions on food packs, a free helpline is available through the Food Safety Advisory Centre to offer practical advice.

Freephone: 0800 282 407

## ~~~~ Any questions?

### ● When will the new labelling scheme appear?

The new labelling scheme started in early 1992. Most new ovens and many small food packs used the labels from that time.

By the end of 1993 most microwaveable foods will carry the new symbol with heating instructions.

### ● How do I find out the new (IEC 705) power output of my microwave oven?

On most new microwave ovens this will be displayed on a label on the front of the oven.

For older types of oven, you can ring up the Food Safety Advisory Centre and they will help you. These calls are **FREE**, as is the information they will give to you. Their telephone number is 0800 282 407.

### ● What if my microwave oven does not have a label on the front?

Look in the instruction book and if the power output is not followed by 'IEC 705' you can contact the oven manufacturer or your oven retailer. Alternatively, you can ring the Food Safety Advisory Centre **FREE** and they will give you the help that you need. You will need to tell them the **MAKE** and the **MODEL NUMBER** of your oven.

The calls and information are **FREE**. The telephone number is 0800 282 407.

● **What if the original power output (wattage) for my oven is different from the IEC 705 power output?**

- 1 Make a note of the new (IEC 705) power output for your oven and then use this to match the timings given on food packs displaying the new symbol.
- 2 **Your oven has not changed**, therefore the timings given in your **EXISTING** recipe book remain the same.

● **What is meant by small food packs?**

Small food packs are those weighing up to 500 g, typical of ready meals for 1 or 2 people.

● **How do I find the heating category letter for my oven?**

This will be part of the label on the front of most new ovens. If the oven does not carry a label you can obtain help from the Food Safety Advisory Centre's helpline on 0800 282 407 or you can contact your oven manufacturer. You can, if you wish, buy a DIY home test kit from most supermarkets which will enable you to find out the letter for yourself.

● **What if no heating category letter is given on the oven label?**

You should refer to the oven manufacturer's instruction manual for advice on how to heat small food packs.

● **What if I cannot find out the heating category letter for my oven?**

You may continue to use timings based on wattage, checking the food is piping hot before serving.

● **Why should I follow the instructions for the heating category letter?**

You will get the best result for small food packs by matching the heating category letter of your oven with the information for that letter given on the food pack instructions.

● **Will labels on small food packs refer only to the heating category letter?**

The heating category will normally be given but some food producers and food retailers may prefer to use the power output (wattage) instead of, or in addition to, the heating category. On small food packs displaying the new microwave symbol, this wattage figure is the new IEC 705 rating.

● **Is it necessary to stir or turn the food?**

Some foods require stirring or turning or standing for a time to ensure even heating throughout the food. Always follow the information on the pack and, in any case, check that the food has been heated until it is piping hot throughout.

● **What is meant by piping hot?**

Piping hot means that the food is hotter than 70°C. This is best checked using a food thermometer.

● **Will the storage conditions of the food affect the heating times?**

Food manufacturers recommend that you store the food in a certain manner (e.g. freezer, refrigerator or larder) to ensure food does not spoil.

These instructions should always be followed as the heating times are based on the assumption that these storage methods have been used.

● **Where can I get further advice on heating instructions?**

Oven manufacturers and food retailers will normally be able to provide advice. If you need further help to understand the instructions on food packs, a free helpline is available through the Food Safety Advisory Centre to offer practical advice. Both the call and the advice are free.

**Freephone:** 0800 282 407.

● **Can I have braille or other tactile markings on my microwave oven?**

For those who would like to have tactile markings on their controls, this service is available through some oven manufacturers. You should contact them for details.

## ~~~~~ Power and energy

### **The power output**

This means the amount of microwave energy which is available to heat or cook food placed in the oven. This is shown in watts or W, for example '650W'. The higher the wattage the quicker the heating process.

Traditionally ovens were rated using a variety of systems each of which could give a slightly different wattage value. From September 1990 all oven manufacturers have been measuring the maximum power output using an internationally agreed standard method called IEC 705 (International Electrotechnical Commission specification number 705).

The IEC 705 power output (watts) will be a part of the new label fixed on the front of microwave ovens. Details will also be given in the instruction/recipe book supplied with the oven. If you see 'IEC 705' quoted with the wattage it simply means that is how the power output has been determined.

### **The small pack heating category**

The amount of energy which the oven produces depends partly on the amount of food being heated. So food may not be able to absorb the maximum amount of microwave energy available even though the oven is set on the maximum setting. This does not mean there is anything wrong with the oven design. The oven can be used to heat both small and large quantities but the heating time has to be appropriate. This is why ovens will also be



categorised with a letter, currently from **A** to **E**, according to the power delivered to a small food load. 'A' denotes a lower power output range (longest heating time) and 'E' a higher power output range (shortest heating time). The user matches the letter given on the front of the microwave oven with the same information given on the food pack to give the required microwaving time.