



# FOOD RATING APPS: What Patients & Clients Should Know

## YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN IT –

someone scanning a food package with their phone and instantly getting a green, yellow, or red score that says whether a food is **“GOOD”** or **“BAD”**.

Apps like Yuka are popular because they offer quick guidance and reduce label-reading overwhelm while grocery shopping. This handout is here to guide the **constructive use of food rating apps** – so they support individual food choices without adding stress or pressure.

## What Are Food Rating Apps?

Food rating apps scan a product's barcode, evaluate the product based on certain criteria, and assign a score meant to reflect its healthfulness.

One extremely popular app, Yuka, bases its scores on:<sup>1</sup>

- **Nutritional quality (60%)** (calories, fat, sugar, sodium, fiber, protein)
- **Presence of food additives (30%)**
- **Whether a product is organic (10%)**

## While Convenient, These Apps Can Oversimplify Nutrition

A single score does **not** account for:

- **Portion size**
- **How often you eat a food**
- **Your overall eating pattern**
- **Individual health needs, preferences, or culture**

Foods are scored in isolation, even though health is shaped by **patterns over time**, not one food or ingredient.

## Additives Can Be Misunderstood

Some apps like Yuka penalize foods for containing additives without considering **how much is actually consumed, what the additive is, or why the ingredient is used.**

In reality, many additives:<sup>2</sup>

- **Improve food safety**
- **Maintain freshness**
- **Enhance texture or nutrient delivery**

Penalizing foods based on hazard classifications rather than exposure-based risk assessments can unintentionally create fear – especially around processed foods, which are commonly eaten by children and may be more budget-friendly.

## “Good” vs. “Bad” Food Labels

Color-coded scores and strong language can reinforce the idea that foods are morally “good” or “bad”. For some people, this can increase anxiety around eating rather than support balanced choices. It's also important to remember that individual needs vary. A food that may be considered “bad” in the app may actually be a ‘good’ option for some individuals.

## A Better Way to Use Food Rating Apps

Apps work best as **learning tools**, not final verdicts.

Try this approach:

- **Use scores as a starting point for curiosity, not a rule**
- **Focus on nutrients that matter most for you** (fiber, added sugar, sodium, saturated fat)
- **Remember that no single ingredient defines a food's healthfulness**
- **Think about how foods fit into your overall diet, not just one meal or snack**



### Helpful App Alternative

Some apps focus more on personalization and learning rather than grading foods:

**Open Food Facts** allows users to filter foods based on personal needs (such as allergens, sodium, or saturated fat) and compare options without labeling foods as “bad.”

## Bottom Line

Food rating apps reflect a real desire for clarity in a complex food world. They can **increase awareness** – but they can't replace **nutrition knowledge, context, or professional guidance.**

**Healthy eating isn't about chasing perfect scores. It's about building flexible, enjoyable eating patterns that work for you.**

## References

- 1) Yuka. How are food products scored? Yuka Help Center. <https://help.yuka.io/1/en/article/ijzgfvi1jq-how-are-food-products-scored>
- 2) U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Understanding How the FDA Regulates Food Additives and GRAS Ingredients. FDA. June 6, 2024. <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-additives-and-gras-ingredients-information-consumers/understanding-how-fda-regulates-food-additives-and-gras-ingredients>