

Very Low Energy Diets vs Formulated Meal Replacements

Very Low Energy Diets (VLED) and Formulated Meal Replacements (FMR) share similarities and can be sold in close proximity to each other in pharmacies. Key similarities include their use in weight loss interventions, packaging, product types, branding and shelf placement in retailers. The table below explores the differences in formulation and intent, and outlines key features which can be used to distinguish between the products.

IDENTIFY	VERY LOW ENERGY DIETS (VLED)	FORMULATED MEAL REPLACEMENTS (FMR)
USE	<p>VLED are total diet replacements and are used as the sole source of nutrition for up to 12 weeks. VLED are specifically formulated for the dietary management of overweight and obesity. They are classified in the Food Standard Code as Food for Special Medical Purposes and are to be used under medical supervision.</p> <p>It is important that advice is product specific as directions of use can vary between products. This information can be found on the VLED label and accompanying leaflet.</p>	<p>FMR are a replacement for one or more meals of the day, but not intended as a total diet replacement or the sole source of nutrition.</p>
SALE	<p>VLED have a restriction of sale and can only be purchased from specific places such as a medical practitioner, a dietitian or a pharmacy. They are not available for purchase at places such as supermarkets and department stores.</p>	<p>FMR are treated as a general commodity and are available for purchase at places such as supermarkets, pharmacies and department stores.</p>
REGULATION	<p>VLED are regulated within Standard 2.9.5 — Food for special medical purposes in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). Standard 2.9.5 is specific to medical purpose products and includes comprehensive compositional, labelling and sale requirements.</p>	<p>FMR are regulated within Standard 2.9.3 — Formulated meal replacements and formulated supplementary foods in the Code.</p>
LABELLING	<p>VLED are required to carry the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name or description (e.g. <i>VLED</i> or <i>Very Low Energy Diet</i>) • the food must be used under medical supervision • the medical purpose of the food (e.g. <i>for the dietary management of overweight and obesity</i>) • the food is suitable for use as a sole source of nutrition (e.g. <i>nutritionally complete program</i>) • it is important to maintain adequate daily fluid intake while using the food • the food is not recommended for pregnant, nursing, or lactating women or use by infants, children, adolescents and elderly, other than under medical supervision. 	<p>FMR are required to carry the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the prescribed name of <i>Formulated Meal Replacement</i> • the product must not be used as a total diet replacement.
COMPOSITION	<p>VLED are required to contain (based on an average of three VLED per day):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an energy range of 627 – 1115 kJ per serve • no less than 16.7 g protein per serve • no less than 16.7 g carbohydrate per serve • specified vitamins and minerals. 	<p>FMR are required to contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no less than 850 kJ per serve • no less than 12 g protein • specified vitamins and minerals.

More information and resources on VLED are available at: www.foodstandards.gov.au/very-low-energy-diets.

Other products advertised for weight loss may be classified as medicines. Medicines are regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and have an AUST L number or AUST R number on the label. Determining if a product is a food or a medicine will depend on the claims being made, the form it comes in and/or the ingredients it contains. Refer to the TGA website for more information on weight loss products that are medicines: www.tga.gov.au/products/medicines/weight-loss-products.