

A Guide *to* Reading Food Labels

Reading food labels can help you make wise food choices. Most foods list nutrition information on the package label, called Nutrition Facts. These facts can help you compare foods and choose the healthiest option.

Sample Label

1 Serving Size

2 Calories

3 Limit These Nutrients

4 Get Enough of These Nutrients

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g) Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g

5 Percent Daily Value

6 Understanding the Footnote

Make healthy choices easier by understanding the sections of the Nutrition Facts label.

1 Serving Size

The serving size is a measured amount of food. In the sample label, the serving size is one cup, and there are two servings per container. If you ate the whole container, you would eat two cups, which doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers. Check the serving size on food labels to determine if the number of servings you are eating is smaller or larger. This will help you stay within your daily calorie goal.

2 Calories

The number of calories is the total amount of energy the food provides. Pay attention to calories. If you eat more calories than your body uses, over time you will gain weight. Another important part of the label is the number of calories from fat. You should limit the number of calories from fat to 20-35% of your total daily calories. In the sample label, there are 250 calories in one serving and 110 calories from fat. This means almost 50% of the calories in a single serving of this food come from fat. Due to its high fat content, this food is not a healthy choice.

3 Limit These Nutrients

Americans typically eat too much saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium, which can increase the risk for heart disease, cancer or diabetes. Total fat is important to watch, but saturated fat and trans fat are particularly bad for you. They may raise your blood cholesterol level, which can increase your risk of heart disease. Choose foods containing less than 10% of calories from saturated fat.

4 Get Enough of These Nutrients

You should get more fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in your diet. Eating enough of these nutrients can reduce your risk for certain cancers, osteoporosis or hypertension. It is recommended to consume 100% of each of these nutrients daily to prevent nutrition-related diseases.

5 Percent Daily Value

Understanding the Percent Daily Values (% DV) on a food label can help you choose foods high in good nutrients and low in bad nutrients. The % DV is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. If you eat less than 2,000 calories a day, your daily value may be lower than what is listed on the label. If you eat more than 2,000 calories a day, your daily value may be higher. Remember, 5% DV or less is low and 20% or more is high. Choose foods with a low % DV for fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, or sodium.

6 Understanding the Footnote

The footnote refers to the Percent Daily Value, mentioned in number five. It states that the percentages are based on a 2,000-calorie diet, which does not change from product to product. This footnote also reminds consumers of the daily intake of different recommended nutrients depending on their caloric needs.

Adapted from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "How to Use and Understand the Nutrition Facts Labels", page last updated February 27, 2013, <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/NFLPM/ucm274593.htm>.