

Breaking Down Food Labels To Build Food Knowledge

Decoding Nutritional Labels

The Nutrition Facts labels on food have a lot of information that can be overwhelming, but knowing how to use them is key to making healthy food choices. Here is a breakdown of important information included on these labels so you can better understand what's in your food.

Start Here →

Check Calories

Limit These Nutrients

Get Enough of These Nutrients

Footnotes

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container about 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	
Proteins 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%
*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 60g
Saturated 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

Quick Guide to % DV

5% or less is Low

20% or more is High

Building A Food Vocabulary

Food manufacturers spend millions of dollars each year to market food products to the public. Unfortunately, some foods that claim to be healthy may not be as healthy as the package suggests. Here are a few terms that commonly appear on food products. Learning what these terms mean will help you identify healthy food options and build a food vocabulary.

100% Whole Wheat

This term means that you are getting whole grain wheat flour that includes all parts of the grain, which has been linked to health benefits. Food labeled "Wheat" or "Multigrain" does not mean whole wheat and can contain flour that has been bleached or overly processed.

Whole Grain

Foods made from whole grains contain all parts of the grain seed and can contain any whole grain kernel, including such grains as rice, barley, corn, oats, and quinoa.

Antioxidants

A substance that reduces damage done to the body by oxidation and free radicals. Well-known antioxidants include vitamins C and E, and beta-carotene.

Natural or All Natural

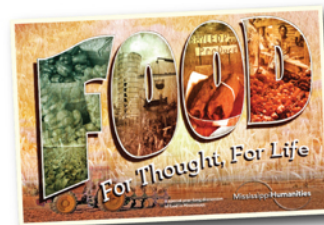
There is no federal definition or regulations associated with the word "Natural." Products labeled "Natural" are not necessarily good for you and can still be packed with sugar, salt, and additives.

Organic

Foods labeled "Organic" meet a list of USDA regulations that guarantee these foods are free of synthetic additives, like pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and dyes.

Foods labeled "100% Organic" means all ingredients meet USDA Organic guidelines.

Foods labeled "Made With Organic" means that some ingredients are organic, but not all.



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The Serving Size

This is the first place to look when checking out a food label.

All values on the label are based on 1 serving size which influences the number of calories and nutrient amounts listed on the rest of the label.

Pay attention to the serving size and ask yourself, "How many servings am I eating?" If you're eating 2 servings, then you're eating double the calories and other nutrients.

Calories

Calories measure the amount of energy supplied in food. If it is not burned up during the day, it will be stored as fat in the body.

The average moderately active male needs between 2100-2600 calories/day; the average moderately active female between 1600-1900 calories a day. So in order to meet calorie requirements and be able to eat enough to "fill you up"; you need to choose a lot of low and moderate calorie foods.

Guide to Calories

40 calories per serving is low

100 calories per serving is moderate

400 calories per serving is high

Limit These Nutrients

Eating too much fat, saturated fat, trans fats, cholesterol, and sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases. Use foods with 5% or less of saturated fats and cholesterol, and avoid those with over 20% of the daily value.

Get Enough of These Nutrients

Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases. Eating high fiber foods helps with digestion and helps people feel full longer. Food with 5 grams of fiber or more are considered high fiber foods.

Foods are good sources of a vitamin or mineral if the % Daily Value is 10% or higher.

Understanding the Footnote

This footnote is always the same for every food label because it shows dietary recommendations for the average individual. The Daily Values in the footnote are based on a suggested 2,000 calorie diet for the average person or a 2,500 calorie diet for a very active person who exercises at least 1 hour a day. Depending on your body and needs, the footnote provides a guide for your daily food consumption.

Building A Food Vocabulary

Sodium Free

This means that a product contains less than 5 mg of sodium per serving.

Low-Sodium

This indicates that a product contains 140 mg of sodium or less per serving.

Reduced Sodium

This indicates that a product contains at least 25% less sodium than the standard version. Some "reduced sodium" products are still very high in sodium.

Sugar Free

Sugar Free foods must contain less than 0.5 grams of sugar per serving. Even if a product says "Sugar Free," it may still be very high in other carbohydrates and contain artificial sweeteners.

No Added Sugar

The term "No Added Sugar" does not mean "Sugar Free." Rather, this term means that the manufacturer has added no additional sugar to the product. These products can still contain a large amount of natural sugar.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 Fatty Acids are fats that are essential for a healthy body, especially for healthy brain and heart function. Since our bodies cannot make omega-3 fatty acids, we must get them from food or supplements.

Trans Fats

Trans fats or trans fatty acids are industrially created artificial fats. Trans fats are not listed on food ingredient lists, but instead are listed as "partially hydrogenated oil" and "hydrogenated oil." Trans fats or "partially hydrogenated oils" elevate your risk of heart disease and stroke, so check food labels for any type of "hydrogenated oil."