

Cracking the code: NUTRITION LABELS

Watch your sodium intake! Eat fewer carbs! Make sure you're getting enough vitamin C! Anyone trying to eat healthy has likely heard these tidbits of advice. But how can you know if you are making the healthiest choices? Fortunately the secret to success isn't a secret at all if you know where to look. Most food products have a nutrition label with information that can help people make informed food choices. The guide below, adapted from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Mayo Clinic, will help you crack the nutrition label code.

Serving size

Serving sizes are listed in standard units such as cups, ounces or pieces. The label will also typically include the number of servings per container so you can calculate the total calories and nutrients in the entire package.

Nutrients to limit

(fat, cholesterol, sodium and sugar)

Eating too many of these nutrients can increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, some cancers or high blood pressure.

Nutrients to increase

(dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron)

Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your overall health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions such as heart disease and osteoporosis.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 5 oz. (144g)			
Servings Per Container 4			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 310		Calories from Fat 100	
		% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 15g			21%
Saturated Fat 2.6g			17%
Trans Fat 1g			
Cholesterol 118mg			39%
Sodium 560mg			28%
Total Carbohydrate 12g			4%
Dietary Fiber 1g			4%
Sugars 1g			
Protein 24g			
Vitamin A 1%		Vitamin C 2%	
Calcium 2%		Iron 5%	
*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
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
Calories per gram:			
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4			

Calories

This number tells you how many calories are in one serving and, in some cases, how many of those calories come from fat.

Percent Daily Value

These percentages are calculated based on an average daily diet of 2,000 calories. In this sample label, the total fat is equal to 21 percent of the total amount of fat recommended for one day. You can use this number to determine if a food is too high in nutrients you need to limit or too low in nutrients you need to increase.

Footnote

All nutrition labels are required to note that the percent daily values are calculated based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Depending on the package size, the label may also include a list of recommended nutrient values based on a 2,000 calorie diet. These recommended values are general and not specific to the food package.

Maintaining or losing weight often boils down to budgeting calories and keeping an eye on what nutrients you are consuming. When comparing similar food options, you should make informed choices based on what will help you stay within your daily calorie budget and limit or increase each type of nutrient.



For more information on understanding nutrition labels, visit www.fda.gov and www.mayoclinic.com.