



Understanding Packaged Food Labels

With the array of products on grocery shelves today, you may wonder how to select the best product for your health needs and weight loss goals. Packaged food labels can help.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1/2 cup (about 82g)	
Servings Per Container 8	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 200	Calories from Fat 130
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 14g	22%
Saturated Fat 9g	45%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 55mg	18%
Sodium 40mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%
Sugars 14g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 10% • Vitamin C 0%	
Calcium 10% • Iron 6%	
*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 300 mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram:	
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

On the back or sides of packages, manufacturers must include a Nutrition Facts label along with the ingredients list. As you'll see, both are important to understand because they tell you different things about the product.

Nutrition Facts Label

Nutrition Facts labels are broken down into six main categories: serving size, calories, fat, sodium, carbohydrate, and protein. Here is what you need to know about each:

- Serving Size.** Start here by checking the serving size. The label describes the nutritional value for the stated serving size, not the whole package. For example, if the label on a box of rice says the serving size is one cup, but you usually eat two cups, you will need to double all of the nutrition information.
- Calories.** The average person should consume about 2,000 calories per day, less if you're not active and/or female. Remember that the calories listed on the label will only be for the serving size, not the whole package. So that frozen pizza that lists 350 calories per serving turns into 1050 calories—more than half your day's allotment—if you eat half the pizza instead of just 1/6 as stated on the box. It's best to spread out the calories you consume throughout the day.
- Total Fat (including saturated fat and trans fat).** Total fat tells you how much fat is in one serving of the product. It includes healthy fats our bodies need (mono and polyunsaturated fats) and unhealthy fats we should limit (saturated fat) and avoid entirely (trans fat).
 - Trans fat.** Don't be fooled by a label that lists 0 grams (g) trans fat. Because of a labeling loophole, a product can contain up to 0.5g trans fat per serving but can say it has none. Check the ingredients list: If it includes partially hydrogenated oil or shortening, it contains trans fat.
- Sodium.** Sodium is a component of salt (also known as sodium chloride). Adults should aim for less than 2,300mg of sodium per day; this includes added table salt as well as sodium already present in foods. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes or kidney disease; are over 50; or are of African-American descent, it is recommended to consume even less sodium (1,500mg daily). Fresh foods are generally much lower in sodium than packaged foods. That half-pizza mentioned above? It clocks in at 3060mg of sodium!

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- **Total Carbohydrate (including sugar and fiber).** The total carbohydrate listed includes sugars, dietary fiber, and other carbohydrates. Although carbohydrates are part of a healthy and balanced diet, some carbohydrates are better than others. Try to get the majority of your carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grain sources (for example, whole grain cereals, breads, brown rice and quinoa). Look for the **Whole Grain Stamp** and choose foods with more fiber, and less sugar.
- **Note:** Sugars, listed on nutrition labels, include both naturally-occurring sugars and added sugars. Foods with only natural sugars—like fruit and milk—will show a number next to sugars on the Nutrition Facts label, but will not show any sugar-words (high fructose corn syrup, evaporated cane juice, dextrose, malt syrup, corn syrup solids) in the ingredients list.
- **Protein.** Protein plays a vital role in the maintenance and repair of our bodies. Foods like chicken, tofu, seafood, beef, dairy products, nuts and beans are high in protein.



Ingredients List

- As a general rule of thumb, the fewer ingredients a product has, the healthier it may be. Ingredients are listed in descending order, from the greatest amount to the least. This means that foods with sugar as the first or second ingredient are likely high in sugar and calories and may be low in other essential nutrients.
- **Added Sugar.** Added sugars can go by a variety of names, and are found in many products, especially sodas, cookies and other special-occasion treats. Be wary of “sugar free” or “no added sugar” labels as they can be deceptive. Check the ingredients list; names for added sugars include:
 - Brown Sugar
 - Corn Sweetener
 - Corn Syrup
 - Dextrose
 - Evaporated Cane Juice
 - Fructose
 - Fruit Juice Concentrates
 - Glucose
 - High-fructose Corn Syrup
 - Honey
 - Invert Sugar
 - Lactose
 - Maltose
 - Malt Syrup
 - Molasses
 - Raw Sugar
 - Sucrose
 - Sugar alcohols including sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol

A Final Word about Buzz Words

Skip the front of the package! Consider it a billboard for product marketers rather than useful nutrition information. This is where you'll see words like Reduced Fat, Low Fat, and Light. Don't let these words fool you into thinking that the product is automatically healthy. These words are often used on packaging to describe products that are lower in fat but not necessarily nutritious. A low-fat food can also be high in sugar or high in calories, so it's always best to read the ingredients list and Nutrition Facts label.