



How to Read a Food Label

There are six main things to look at on a nutrition label: 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 pasta says the serving size is 2 ounces (which cooks up to 1 cup), but you usually eat 2 cups of pasta, 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. It sounds like a lot but consider your average McDonald's Big Mac meal (Big Mac, medium fries and coke) has about 1,130 calories. That is more than half of the calories you should consume for one day. Remember that the calories listed on the label will only be for the serving size, not the whole package. It's best to spread out the calories you consume throughout the day.

Total Fat (including Saturated Fat & 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 poly-unsaturated fat) and unhealthy fats we should limit (saturated and trans fat). **Remember to limit the saturated fat and avoid ALL trans fat.**

Buzz Words: 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, while offering little that's good for you.

Sodium. Sodium is a component of sodium chloride, also known as salt. 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 that you consume even less sodium (1,500 mg daily). Fresh foods are generally much lower in sodium than packaged foods.

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

(continued)



Total Carbohydrate (including Sugar and Dietary Fiber). The total carbohydrate listed includes sugars, dietary fiber, and other carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are part of a healthy and balanced diet. However, some carbohydrates are better than others. Try to get the majority of your carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grain sources (such as whole grain cereals and breads, brown rice, quinoa). Look for the Whole Grain Stamp which details how many grams of whole grains are in each serving – and choose foods with more fiber, and less sugar.

Sugars. 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 Panel, but will not show any sugar-words in the ingredient list. *Added* sugars are found in many products, especially sodas, cookies, and other special-occasion treats. Limit the added sugars, by referring to the ingredients list at the bottom of the food label. Names for added sugars on food labels include:

- Brown Sugar
- Invert Sugar
- Corn Sweetener
- Lactose
- Corn Syrup
- Maltose
- Dextrose Fructose
- Malt Syrup
- Fruit Juice Concentrates
- Molasses
- Glucose
- Raw Sugar
- High-fructose Corn Syrup
- Sucrose
- Honey

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.

A Final Word about Ingredients. As a general rule of thumb, the fewer ingredients a product has, the healthier it is. 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 needed nutrients.