



How to Understand Food Labels

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1/4 of recipe (176g)	
Servings Per Container	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 170	Calories from Fat 35
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	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 4g	8%
Saturated Fat 0.5g	3%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 400mg	17%
Total Carbohydrate 28g	9%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 14g	
Protein 8g	
<hr/>	
Vitamin A 10%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 6%	Iron 10%
<small>*Percent Daily Values are based on a diet of 2,000 calories. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:</small>	
	<small>Calories: 2,000 2,500</small>
Total Fat	<small>Less Than 65g 80g</small>
Saturated Fat	<small>Less Than 20g 25g</small>
Cholesterol	<small>Less Than 300mg 300 mg</small>
Sodium	<small>Less Than 2,400mg 2,400mg</small>
Total Carbohydrate	<small>300g 375g</small>
Dietary Fiber	<small>25g 30g</small>
<small>Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4</small>	

The History of Food Labels

Food labels were regulated in 1994. Before then, food companies could print their products' nutritional information basically anywhere they wanted to (and often in really small print).

The Food and Drug Administration required companies to format the information in a structured way and to include helpful information on the label -- in a set size and organized manner.

These regulations required both the ingredients and nutritional information to be provided along with a food label of a

standard size and shape (a rectangle) labeled "Nutrition Facts". In this box, you will find nutritional information listed in order of importance.

In 1994, the FDA and U.S. Department of Agriculture required that:

- labels provide information on how the food fits into an overall daily diet
- labels will include information on the amount per serving of saturated fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber, and other nutrients of health concern to today's consumers
- terms such as light, "fat-free," and "low-calorie" meet government definitions
- be consistent across product lines to make comparison shopping easier
- expressed in common measures
- reflect amounts people actually eat (Good Reading)

Serving Sizes

Serving size is the first item listed on a nutrition label. Serving sizes are standardized, recommended snack or meal size portions. Depending on the type of food, the serving size may be indicated by cup measure or number, such as one cup of cereal or one slice of bread. Some foods, like salad dressing, can be represented by small measures like tablespoons. This

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information is followed by the metric amount (e.g., grams) the serving contains.

Serving size is the most important part of the food label. It is integral to using the additional information on the label to lose weight. Whether you count calories, fat grams, or carbs, it is impossible to accurately track them without knowing and measuring serving sizes.

The following items are indicated on all food labels:

Percent Daily Value

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%

Sometimes referred to as DV, the Percent Daily Value displays the amount of nutrients found in each serving of the food such as calories, fat, cholesterol, sodium and vitamins. These values are set by the Food and Drug Administration.

For example, a food that has 13g of fat per serving would state a 20 percent daily value on the label (Daily Values).

Calories and Percent Fat Calories

The calories in a serving are displayed directly under the portion sizes. The number of calories you actually take in is determined by the number of servings you eat.

The FDA considers a food with 40 calories or less per serving to be low calorie; 100 calories per serving, moderate; and 400 calories or more per servings is a high calorie food (How to Understand).

The food label assumes that the typical adult needs 2,000 calories a day to maintain his/her weight. Most people fall somewhere in the middle, with men requiring more daily calories than women to maintain their weight.

It is recommended that your diet provides no more than 30 percent of total calories from fat (Choose a Diet). For a 2,000 calorie diet, no more than 600 calories of your day's food intake should comprise of fat.

Fat

A food's fat and saturated fat content is displayed next. Starting in 2003, the FDA added trans fat to the label and it became required in 2006. Some manufacturers also include

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monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats on labels.

Fat is listed in grams. Too much fat leads to overweight and obesity, however our bodies need some fat in order to function. For a 2,000 calorie diet, it means eating no more than 65 grams of fat each day.

Saturated and trans fat are known as “bad fats” because they raise cholesterol and can lead to health risks such as heart disease.

Unsaturated fat is a “good fat” that is healthy because it will not raise your cholesterol level. An example of a good fat is olive oil.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is listed under fats. It is a fatty substance found in animal products such as meat and dairy products. Cholesterol is a major factor in the risk of heart disease and heart attack. The American Heart Association recommends that you limit your average daily cholesterol intake to less than 300 milligrams (Limiting Fats).

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates -- often referred to as carbs -- are listed next. Carbohydrate is an energy source used for bodily functions for everything from just walking to intense, prolonged exercise.

Carbohydrates from whole grain sources such as brown rice are preferable to those contained in refined carbohydrates such as white bread because of the way the body processes them.

Unless you're following a low-carbohydrate diet, it is acceptable to eat up to 300 grams of carbohydrate each day.

Protein

Protein is used by the body to build cells and maintain muscle and other tissues. In the average American's diet, it is mostly derived from meat, poultry, fish, and/or eggs. Dairy foods, beans and nuts also contain protein.

Protein does not have a recommended daily value indicated on the food label. Protein needs

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are actually variable depending on your weight and activity level.

Using Food Labels in the Real World

The key part of using food labels is they provide instant portion control. The only way you can use food labels effectively is to measure and eat portions based on the recommended servings sizes.

The good news is, in time, assessing the serving size of your favorite foods will become second nature.

At first, measuring food servings will seem tedious, but it will not always be that way. Within a matter of weeks, you will learn to eyeball servings and practice automatic portion control.

Once you assess your caloric needs, food labels will help you identify areas in which you can cut back painlessly and lose weight.

For example, when you see your favorite yogurt contains 160 calories per serving, it will be much easier to identify one that contains 100 calories if you always check the nutrition label. If you eat yogurt every day, this one change can cut over 400 calories from your diet each week!

Remember ... every 3,500 calories cut or burned equals one pound lost. A little light reading on the packages of your favorite foods could be the start to making it happen.

Sources:

"Daily Values Encourage Healthy Diet." FDA. 30 Oct 2006
<<http://www.fda.gov/fdac/special/foodlabel/dvs.html>>.

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<<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/dga/dga95/lowfat.html>>.

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"Limiting Fats and Cholesterol." American Heart Association. 30 Oct 2006
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