

UNDERSTANDING THE NUTRITION FACTS LABEL



Knowing what is in the food you eat is vital to monitoring food intake and making healthy choices. ¹Food labeling is required by the FDA to be put on prepared and packaged foods such as breads, canned foods, drinks, etc. ²The labels must have the name of the food, its net weight, manufacturing information, an ingredient list, nutrition information, and potential allergens. If you take the time to understand and compare these food labels, healthier choices can be made. Food labels give you clues as to what you are eating, and being able to decipher those clues is what will help you succeed in making healthier choices.

The nutrition facts label has three main parts:

1. Energy Components
2. Heart Health Components and
3. Micronutrients

Here is a map to help you determine how to interpret the nutrition facts label

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size: ½ c (127g)	
Servings per container: 4	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories: Calories from Fat:	
% Daily Value (DV)	
1	Total Fat __g ___%
	Saturated Fat __g ___%
	Trans Fat __g ___%
3	Polyunsaturated Fat __g ___%
	Monounsaturated Fat __g ___%
4	Cholesterol __mg ___%
	Sodium __mg ___%
	Potassium __mg ___%
5	Total Carbohydrate __g ___%
	Dietary Fiber __g ___%
	Sugars __g ___%
	Protein __g ___%
6	Vitamin % Vitamin %
	Vitamin % Vitamin %
	Vitamin % Vitamin %
	Calcium % Iron %
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet	
7	Ingredient List:

Match the following numbers with the numbers circled in red on the nutrition facts label.

ENERGY COMPONENTS



1 HOW MUCH ARE YOU EATING?

All the information on the nutrition facts label describes one serving. Usually there is more than one serving in a container, so be sure to look at the serving size and servings per container when portioning out a meal. Larger portions increase the number of calories and other nutrients from what is on the label, so it is important to be aware of that.

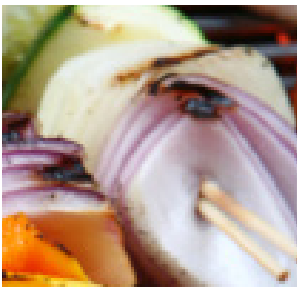
2 “CALORIES COUNT”

- The calorie count written is PER SERVING. Along side the calories per serving is the number of calories that come from fat.
- As a general rule, look for foods that contain less than 20% of its calories from fat.
- The number of calories recommended is dependent on age, gender, and lifestyle (active vs. sedentary). To find out how many calories are recommended for you, talk to a dietitian. Calorie needs can be evaluated based on changes in body weight.

5 TOTAL CARBOHYDRATES & PROTEIN

- Roughly 45-65% of your total calories should be made up of carbohydrates.
- ²Carbohydrates are found primarily in plant-based foods such grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes. They provide the body with energy in the form of glucose.
- The amount of fiber and sugar is listed on the nutrition facts label under the total carbohydrates. ²Fiber is a non-digestible form of carbohydrates that helps with digestion and disease prevention. Fourteen g of fiber for every 1,000 calories provides those benefits. The sugar listed on the facts label is a combination of natural and added sugars. Choosing foods low in sugar can lower your risk of diabetes, tooth decay, hypertension, and several other problems.
- Proteins play a number of roles in the body. They help your body fight off infections, keep your hair and nails strong, provide energy, maintain fluid balances, and help transport nutrients throughout the body. In the U.S. protein deficiency is not as common as in other countries, but without enough of it, protein-related malnutrition can develop and bones could get weaker. On the other hand, over consumption of protein can lead to other health concerns such as kidney stones, heart problems, and some cancers. It is important to consume a balance of about 5 ½ oz. a day from a variety of food sources.

HEART HEALTH COMPONENTS



3 FAT CONTENT

- The four major groups of dietary fat are: Monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, saturated, and trans.
- Unsaturated fats have a unique structure that keeps them in a liquid phase. They come from plant sources in two forms: monounsaturated fats (such as olive oil) and polyunsaturated fats (such as soybean, corn, and canola oil) and are considered to be the healthier fats. They help your body absorb fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E, & K), help maintain cell membrane structure, and act as a storage source of energy that is used between meals.
- Saturated fats (such as butter, lard, and shortening) come from animal sources, with the exception of palm and coconut oils. These fats are not heart friendly; therefore, you should reduce your consumption of these fats.



- Trans fats are fats that were once unsaturated and then were chemically altered to become a solid. These fats are such bad news that they aren't even given a daily value percent. The lower the amount you consume, the better. Fats should make up 20-35% of your total calories, so keep that in mind when you are planning your meals.

4 OTHER HEART HEALTHY FACTORS

- **Cholesterol:** Cholesterol is an essential component of every cell in your body. ⁴It assists in forming hormones, Vitamin D, and digestive factors. You create all the cholesterol you need through your liver, but it is okay to have some cholesterol in the diet.
- **Sodium:** ²Sodium is an electrolyte that helps regulate fluid balance. If too much sodium is in the body, blood pressure will get too high (hypertension) and put you at risk for things such as heart disease, cancer, kidney disease, or a stroke. ³Try to choose foods that contain fewer milligrams of sodium than the number of calories per serving.
- **Potassium:** Potassium is a mineral found in many foods. ²It plays a role in muscle contraction, lowering blood pressure, strengthening bones, and balancing fluids in the body. Potassium has the unique quality of being readily available in most foods and being excreted in your urine when too much is consumed. This makes it easy to prevent under- and over-consumption.

MICRO-NUTRIENTS



6 MICRONUTRIENTS

- Vitamins are divided into two main categories: water-soluble and fat-soluble. It is important to consume enough vitamins in your diet to ³aid in growth, reproduction and overall health. It is very rare that too many vitamins are consumed when they are obtained through food, but over-consumption through supplements can occur and can be toxic.
- Minerals are additional micronutrients needed in your body. Nutrition labels often list calcium and iron, as they are the most abundant minerals on earth. Calcium plays a vital role in bone strengthening, ²making up 40% of the weight in your bones. Without enough calcium in your diet, you will be at risk for osteoporosis. Iron, on the other hand works more in the blood. It is the master of carrying oxygen from the lungs to various tissues in need. Having too little of it in the blood can cause dizziness and the feeling of being lightheaded or nauseated.

7 INGREDIENT LIST

- At the bottom of the label, the final information is given: the ingredient list. Ever look at that list and wonder what foreign language it was written in? You could do research on each ingredient, but if you don't have time, just look for some key factors. First, how many ingredients are there? It is a good rule of thumb to choose foods with few ingredients. With a smaller list, there are usually less added sugars and unhealthy chemicals. The other thing to notice is what the first ingredient is and what the last ingredient is. Ingredients are listed in the amount present going from most abundant to least. If you have a label that lists all the sugars first, and healthier additions at the end, you might want to rethink your choice.

Understanding the nutrition facts label can sometimes be a daunting task, but with practice, you will be able to discover many hidden treasures in the foods you eat. This will help you make healthier choices and have an overall healthier diet.

SOURCES

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