

Food Labels

How do I use the Nutrition Facts label?

Reading and comparing nutrition facts on food labels can help you make healthy food choices.

The FDA requires almost all foods in grocery stores to have a Nutrition Facts label on the package. Fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh fish, very small packages, and foods made in the store do not have to include this label. The FDA asks stores to use posters to provide this information for fresh fruits, vegetables, and fish.

Serving Size: At the top of the nutrition label is the serving size and number of servings in the food package. Even small packages may contain more than one serving per package. If you eat more than one serving, you will need to multiply the calories and nutrients by the number of servings you eat. Serving sizes can vary from product to product. If you are comparing 2 products, check to see if the serving sizes are the same.

Calories: The number of calories per serving is listed after the serving-size information. Calories are the measure of how much energy you get from a serving of a food.

The Nutrition Facts label is based on a 2000-calorie-a-day diet. The number of calories you should eat may be higher or lower, depending on your age, gender, and how active you are. For example, inactive or older people usually need fewer calories. Active people and teens may need more calories per day. Keep this in mind when you read the label. A footnote near the bottom of the label shows the amounts of some nutrients you should get from a 2000-calorie-a-day diet. It may also show these amounts for 2500 calories a day.

Calories from Fat: The label lists the number of calories that come from fat in a serving of the food. If the food has 200 calories and 100 calories are from fat, 50% of the calories come from fat, which means the food is high in fat.

Nutrients

The label lists the total amount of each nutrient in grams (g) in 1 serving.

- **Fat:** Fat supplies flavor and calories to food. Fat has more than twice the calories of other nutrients. Fat provides energy, helps your body absorb some nutrients, and helps your body to make hormones. Saturated fats and trans fats (solid fats) raise your cholesterol level. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (liquid fats) are a healthier type of fat. Try to eat less than a third of your daily calories from fat each day.
- **Cholesterol:** Cholesterol is in animal products such as meat, eggs, and dairy. Try to eat less than 300 milligrams (mg) each day.
- **Sodium:** Much of the sodium (salt) in your diet comes from processed or packaged foods. Try to eat less than 2300 mg each day.

Choosing foods that are low in fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, or sodium may reduce your risk of heart disease, cancer, or high blood pressure.

Other nutrients listed on the label are:

- **Carbohydrates:** Carbohydrates help give you energy. Sugar and fiber are different types of carbohydrates.
 - **Sugars:** Sugar occurs naturally in foods such as fruits and milk. It is also added to many foods, such as cookies and snacks. If you want to know if sugar has been added, look at the first few ingredients listed on the label. Look for names like corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, dextrose, sucrose, honey, and maple syrup.
 - **Fiber:** Eating fiber can help lower your risk of heart disease, keep your bowel movements regular, and lower your cholesterol level. Try to eat at least 20 to 35 g of fiber per day.
- **Protein:** Protein helps build muscle. Your body cannot store protein the way that it can store fat, but most people get enough protein from the food they eat each day.

% Daily Value (% DV): Next to most nutrients, the label shows the percentage of the recommended daily amount that you will get from 1 serving of that food. Some of the nutrients listed on the label (sugar, protein, and trans fat) don't have a % DV. The label must include a footnote that tells you whether the daily value is based on a 2000 or 2500 calorie diet.

- **Saturated fat:** If the % DV of saturated fat for 1 serving of a food is 25%, that food is high in fat. If you ate 4 servings, you ate 100% of the recommended amount of fat for the day.
- **Vitamins and Minerals:** Vitamins and minerals are only listed by % DV. Food labels are required to include values for the vitamins A and C, and for calcium and iron, which are important parts of a healthy diet. Other vitamins and minerals may also be listed. For most people, the goal is to reach 100% of the daily value (DV) for each vitamin and mineral every day. In some cases, you may need more than 100% of some nutrients. For example, teens may need more calcium.

What do terms on the label mean?

Food packages have many terms. By law, here is what the terms mean:

Fat

- **Fat-free** means the food has less than 0.5 grams (g) of fat per serving.
- **Low-fat** means 3 g of fat or less per serving.
- **Reduced fat or less fat** means the food has at least 25% less fat than the regular product.
- **Trans fat free** means the food has less than 0.5 g trans fat per serving. Even though a food says “trans fat free,” it may still contain 0.49 g trans fat. Eating many servings of a food with small amounts of trans fat per serving can add up.

Cholesterol

- **Cholesterol free** means less than 2 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per serving. It also means that the food has 2 g or less of saturated fat per serving.

- **Low cholesterol** means 20 mg of cholesterol or less per serving. It also means that the food has 2 g of saturated fat or less per serving.

Salt/sodium

- **Salt/Sodium-Free** means less than 5 mg of sodium per serving.
- **Very Low Sodium** means less 35 mg of sodium or less per serving.
- **Low sodium** means 140 mg of sodium or less per serving.
- **Reduced Sodium** means at least 25% less sodium than in the original product.
- **Light in Sodium or Lightly Salted** means at least 50% less sodium than the regular product.
- **No-Salt-Added or Unsalted** means that no salt is added during processing. It does not mean that there is no sodium in the product.

Other Terms

- **Low calorie** means 40 calories or less per serving.
- **Sugar-free** means less than 0.5 grams of sugar per serving.
- **Fortified** means the food provides at least 10% of the daily requirement for the nutrient the food is fortified with, such as iron or calcium.
- **High** or **rich** means the food contains at least 20% the daily value for a specific nutrient such as protein or fat.
- **Gluten-free** means the product contains less than 20 parts per million (ppm) gluten. Gluten is a protein found in wheat and other grains.

How do I read the ingredients list?

Food packages should list the ingredients somewhere on the package. The ingredients are listed in order of the highest to lowest content by weight. For example, the ingredients list on a can of water packed tuna may read “tuna, water, salt.” The tuna is listed first because it weighs the most and is the main ingredient. The water weighs less than the tuna, and the salt weighs the least. The ingredients list includes any nutrients, color additives, preservatives, fats, or sugars that have been added.

Food producers must list any food ingredient that is a common cause of allergic reactions. The foods that most often cause allergic reactions are milk, eggs, tree nuts, peanuts, shellfish, fish, soy, and wheat.

Eating a variety of foods everyday is the key to good health. Food labels can help you compare similar foods and make the healthiest choices.

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Nutrition Facts Label

Learning how to read a Nutrition Facts food label will help you fill your kitchen with healthy foods. Read labels as you shop. Compare similar products, then choose the one that best fits your needs and nutritional goals.

Serving size: The serving size is usually less than most people eat. If you eat 2 servings, make sure you double the calories and all of the daily values. When comparing foods, make sure the serving sizes are the same.

Calories: Calories are the measure of how much energy you get from a serving of food. Calories not used for energy are stored as fat. Watching the number of calories in your daily diet can help you manage your weight.

Fat: This lists the total amount of fat in one serving. Try to limit the amount of saturated fat and trans fat you eat.

Cholesterol: Try to eat less than 300 mg each day.

Sodium: Try to eat less than 2300 mg of sodium (salt) each day.

Vitamins and Minerals: This shows you how much of the recommended amount of certain vitamins and minerals are in the food. Your goal is to reach 100% for each vitamin and mineral every day.

Nutrition Facts

Amount Per Serving		% Daily Value*
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)		
Servings Per Container 2		
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110	
		% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g		18%
Saturated Fat 3g		15%
Trans Fat 3g		
Cholesterol 30mg		10%
Sodium 470mg		20%
Potassium 700mg		20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g		10%
Dietary Fiber 0g		0%
Sugars 5g		
Protein 5g		
Vitamin A		4%
Vitamin C		2%
Calcium		20%
Iron		4%
* 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
Sat 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

% Daily Value: This shows how much of the daily recommended amounts of these nutrients are in one serving (based on a 2,000 calorie diet). These percentages make it easy to compare one brand with another. Just make sure the serving size is the same. The goal is to eat no more than 100% of each nutrient each day.

Carbohydrate: This helps give you energy. It is found in bread, pasta, potatoes, fruits, and vegetables. Good sources of fiber include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, peas, and beans. Try to eat at least 20 to 35 g of fiber per day.

Protein: Protein helps build muscle. It is found in meat, nuts, eggs, fish, dry beans, and dairy products. Try to eat lean cuts of meat and nonfat or low-fat dairy products.

Recommended amounts: Here you can see the recommended daily amount for several nutrients for 2 calorie levels: a 2,000 calorie and a 2,500 calorie daily diet. Your recommended daily calories may be higher or lower, depending on your age, gender, and how active you are. However, notice that the recommended amount of sodium and cholesterol are the same no matter how many calories you eat a day.

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