

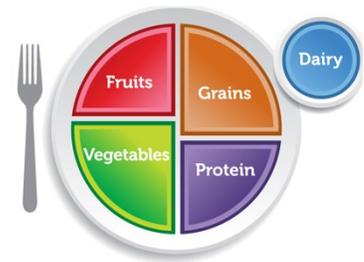
Decoding the Nutrition Facts Label

Making diet and lifestyle changes can be difficult at times. However, you may be happy to know that most food has a built-in tool designed to help you make healthful choices. This tool is known as the Nutrition Facts Label and Ingredient List. While it may be overwhelming at first glance, it is actually full of great information that can help you reach your health goals as you age.

Nutrition and Aging

As you get older, your metabolism slows down, and you need fewer calories.⁵ How much you should be eating depends on many factors and is individual to each person. First, you must eat enough to have the energy to do all your activities of daily living.⁴ Next, balance your food choices for health and wellness, enjoyment, and pleasure. Balance is essential to get enough nutrients, such as carbohydrates, protein, fats, vitamins, and minerals.⁶

To create a balanced plate, divide your plate into four sections. Roughly half your plate should be fruits and vegetables, a quarter of your plate should include grains or starchy foods, and the last quarter of the plate should be protein.³ Don't forget about dairy or dairy alternatives either!³ The Nutrition Facts Label can help you make balanced food choices. But first, it's important to know certain terms on the label.



Understanding the Nutrition Facts Label

When looking at a Nutrition Facts Label and Ingredient List, the most important thing to do is read the whole label. Try not to evaluate a product based on any one item, such as its fat, cholesterol, sugar, carbohydrate, or salt content.²

The first part of the label to review is the serving size. The serving size on a label is not the same as recommended serving size and is sometimes much smaller than the average serving size. It is simply there to know what quantity of that food will provide the listed number of calories.²

Next, look at the number of servings per container. If there is only one serving per container, you will know precisely how many calories the entire package contains.² However, this is not always the case. For example, a bag of chips could have up to 9 servings per bag, so if you were to eat the whole bag, it could be upwards of about 1,300 calories or almost enough for one day of energy.

Fat, Sodium, Sugar

Fat. When trying to reduce your fat intake, a low-fat product has generally 2g of fat or less per 100 calories are a low-fat product.² For example, on this label the product has 240 calories and 4g of fat so this would be considered low fat, while a fastfood cheeseburger may have 300 calories and 12g of fat which would make it a high fat food.

Make sure you are also looking at the types of fat in foods. Look for foods that have less saturated and trans fats (butter, palm oil, shortening). Knowing this will help you better balance out your plate

Sodium. When it comes to sodium, pay more attention to the number of milligrams in the serving than the % Daily Values. Remember the recommended amount of sodium per day is less than 1,500mg.⁶

Added Sugar. Limit caloric sweeteners. Aim for only 2 tablespoons or about 24 grams of added sugar or less per day.² Do not be too concerned about naturally occurring sugars in fruit and some dairy products, focus your attention on the added sugar line.³

Nutrition Facts

4 servings per container

Serving size 1 1/2 cup (208g)

Amount Per Serving

Calories **240**

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 4g	5%
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 5mg	2%
Sodium 430mg	19%
Total Carbohydrate 46g	17%
Dietary Fiber 7g	25%
Total Sugars 4g	
Includes 2g Added Sugars	4%
Protein 11g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 6mg	35%
Potassium 240mg	6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

The Ingredient List

While the Nutrition Facts Label gives you detailed nutrient information, the Ingredient List tells you what the food is made of. The ingredients are listed in descending order of weight.² So, ingredients listed first make up the most of that food.

Whole grains. When reading the list of a grain product such as bread, rice, granola, look to see if the first ingredient is a whole grain. You want to make at least half your grains whole grains.³ Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel are more nutritious and filling while, refined grains have been processed and some nutrients and fiber are lost.⁶

Added Sugar. Look at the ingredient list. Try to avoid foods with added, refined caloric sweeteners in the first three to five ingredients. Look out for sugars and other caloric sweeteners that don't say "sugar" but in fact are.² The farther down the label you find ingredients such as added sugars or refined grains, the better.

Examples:

corn syrup

rice and maple syrup

evaporated cane juice
molasses
honey
malted barley
barley malt
any terms that end in “ol,” such as sorbitol or maltitol
any terms that end “ose,” such as dextrose or fructose

Bringing It All Together

Now that you have a better idea of all the information available on the Nutrition Facts Label you can use it to make healthful food choices in the grocery stores. Remember, to always read the entire Nutrition Facts Label and ingredient list before coming to a conclusion about the product. Use the Nutrition Facts Label to help you reach your health goals, you may even be surprised by what you learn about some products!

Reference

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