Reading the Facts on Reading Food Labels

Food Labels: Read the Writing on the Jar

Getting Labeled

For More Information

US Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov

US Department of Agriculture
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American Dietetic Association
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Reading Food Labels

Your Guide To Understanding The Food You Eat

BlueCross BlueShield of Nebraska
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Food labels are on practically every food item we buy and eat. And for good reason, too. Reading food labels is one of the most important steps you can take to eating well and living healthy. Food labels provide important information about the food you’re eating—serving sizes, calories, fat, important nutrients, as well as salt, sugar, and cholesterol.

Because of the amount of information packed on food labels, it may seem a little overwhelming at first. But not to worry, the following guide will help you read and understand the Nutrition Facts labels on the food you consume.

Here’s what you should look for on the Nutrition Facts label.

### Nutrition Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size 1 cup (228g)</th>
<th>Serving Per Container 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Amount Per Serving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calories 250</th>
<th>Calories from Fat 110</th>
</tr>
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</table>

### SERVING SIZE.

Start by taking a look at the serving size of the food item you have. They tend to be measured in familiar, easy to use units like cups, pieces, or slices and are then followed by the metric weight of the serving (e.g., 25g). To make serving sizes easier for people to relate to, they are based on the approximate amount of food people eat.

You might be surprised by the actual serving sizes of some of the foods you buy—many can be deceiving. For instance, you might notice that the food label on a 20oz. bottle of soda says there are 110 calories per serving. To most people, that 20oz bottle of soda seems like one serving. Upon closer inspection, you’ll find that it’s actually two servings. This means that there are actually 220 calories total in that bottle of soda. Focus Point: The serving size on food labels directly influences all the information on the Nutrition Facts label.

### CALORIES & CALORIES FROM FAT.

This section of the food label tells you how much energy (calories) you’ll get from a serving of the food you’re looking at. It also tells you the amount of calories per serving that come from directly from fat. This is important because foods high in fat are generally high in calorie content. Focus Point: Remember, there are 9 calories in 1 gram of fat.

### NUTRIENTS.

The Nutrients section of the Nutrition Facts label is divided into two main parts: nutrients you should limit, and nutrients you should get more of. The nutrients you should limit typically include fat, carbohydrates, and sodium. They are nutrients that Americans typically over consume, and typically increase your risk for a number of diseases like heart disease, cancer, or diabetes. Nutrients you should get more of typically include vitamins A and C, calcium, fiber, or iron. Generally, Americans do not get enough of these important nutrients, which have shown promise in reducing a number of diseases such as various cancers, osteoporosis, or hypertension. Focus Point: Use the Nutrition Facts label to get a proper balance of the nutrients you need, and the nutrients you should limit.

### THE PERCENT DAILY VALUE (%DV).

This section of the Nutrition Facts label is important because it tells you how well the nutrients in the item you’re planning to eat fit into your daily overall diet (i.e., 2,000 calories/day). For example, if the item you’re looking at has 31g of carbohydrates, which represents 10% of your daily-recommended value, then you have 90% of your carbohydrate allowance left over for whatever else you’ll consume that day. Focus Point: A good rule of thumb to use when looking at the %DV for a food item. 5%DV or less is low, and 20%DV or more is high. So, for the nutrients you want to limit, aim for 5%DV, and for nutrients you want to consume more of, aim for 20%DV or more.

### NUTRITION FACTS FOOTNOTE.

Depending on the physical packaging size of the food item you’re looking at, you may, or may not see this section. When you do see it, it’s important to note that it doesn’t change from product to product. It shows the dietary recommendations for all Americans, not on the specific food you’re looking at. From it, you can learn more about the amount of specific nutrients you should consume based on either a 2,000 or 2,500-calorie diet. For example, if you’re on a 2,000-calorie diet, you can see that you should limit your fat intake to less than 65 grams per day. Focus Point: Although this section breaks out information on both a 2,000 and 2,500 calorie diet, the %DV section is based only on a 2,000 calorie diet.