

Good Nutrition Matters

Your Food and YOU

Food Labels and What They Tell YOU About Your Food



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Reading Food Labels

Sample Label for Macaroni and Cheese

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 cup (228g) ← 1		
Servings Per Container 2 ← 2		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110 ← 3	
Total Fat 12g	Percent of	18%
Saturated Fat 3g ← 6	100% DVs →	15%
Trans Fat 3g		
Cholesterol 30mg		10%
Sodium 470mg		20%
Total Carbohydrates 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 ← 4	Less than	65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g 25g ← 3
Cholesterol	Less than	300g 300g
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrates		300g 375g
Dietary Fiber		25g 30g

NOTE: Cholesterol (300mg) and sodium (2,400mg) levels are the SAME for both 2000/2500 calories.

Why Read Food Labels?

Food labels provide **Nutrition Facts** to help you make quick, smart choices on healthy eating. Labels tell you:

- **size** of one serving (such as 1 cup or 15 pieces). **1**
- **how many** servings are in the container (2 servings). **2**
- **per serving information** like total calories, fat calories, total fats and cholesterol, as well as sodium, fiber, sugar, protein, and vitamins. **3**

Why Do Counting Calories Matter?

Total and fat calories are listed on labels. Pay close attention to **fat calories** as eating too many is linked to **being overweight and obesity**. Additional information on food intake is broken down into percentage of “recommended” metric Daily Values. **4, 5, 6**

Why Do “Recommended” Daily Values Matter?

Our sample label gives you the **Daily Value (DVs)** percents of total fats, saturated fats, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, sugars, proteins, along with vitamins and minerals. Some labels print **the total DVs breakdown of 2000/2500 calories** with recommended daily amounts for major ingredients (**different on each food label**). These listed amounts are 100% of DVs. **4**

Track food items like cholesterol and sodium that specify a **LESS THAN amount**. **Eating less than DVs will keep you healthier.** **5**

The DVs of food labels are based on the Reference Daily Intake (RDI), which is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). DVs are the daily recommended intake level of a nutrient that is sufficient to meet the needs of 97–98% of healthy individuals within the United States. Consult your doctor for more information on calories, healthy weight loss, and proper nutrition.

Keep DV percentage of **saturated** and **trans fats**, **cholesterol**, **sodium**, and **sugars** low.

Percents given on labels represent a percentage of the 100% DVs *recommended*. For example, if total fat on a label was 18%, it would mean one serving has 18% of the 100% DV fat required for 2,000 calorie diet. General **percent** guidelines:

- **5%** is low, while
- **20%** is high **6**

Limit fats (particularly saturated and trans), cholesterol, sodium, and sugar to avoid chronic diseases. General guidelines for **calories**:

- **100 calories** is moderate, while
- **400 calories** is considered higher **3**



One or Two? Serving Size Matters

Watch total calories based on how **MANY servings** you eat. For example, if **one serving** of macaroni and cheese is **one cup (250 total calories)**, then **two servings** is **two cups (500 calories)**. *To offset this **double portion**, you would need to eat less during the day.* **1, 2, 3**



It's Your Choice.

Other Food Label Tips

- When comparing food products, make sure **serving sizes** are similar (example: cups to cups, grams to grams).
- Compare **same categories**: low-fat to low-fat, fat-free to fat-free.
- Make sure you understand what words like **reduced fat**, **fat-free**, **light**, or **low** mean on your food labels. Compare similar labels.
- Ingredients on labels are listed from the **largest** (or highest) amount to the **smallest** (or lowest) amount. Make sure the **healthiest ingredients are highest** on list while other ingredients like sodium and sugars are lower. Choose products with the **healthiest ingredients listed FIRST**.
- Whenever possible, choose food which is the **least PROCESSED**, like canned beans, and has the **least ingredients**. The **more processed** a food is, like cakes and cookies, the **more ingredients** it will have on the label.

EATING HEALTHY helps prevent or manage such diseases as **obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, certain cancers, and bone loss.**

Sources: www.fda.gov, www.choosemyplate.gov, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reference_Daily_Intake
www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information, health.gov/dietaryguideline

For more information, call **Katreena Hite, Integrated Care Specialist**, at (906) 225-7344