

## Food Labels: The Breakdown

### *What do they really say?*

As you eat your cereal in the morning, you notice it on the side of the box - that rectangle with the jumble of words, numbers and percentages. It's the nutrition facts label, and it breaks down what's inside the box — everything from calories to cholesterol. Reading this label can be a little confusing, but by breaking it down, you'll have a clear understanding of the value the information provides in helping you maintain a healthy diet.

#### **Serving Size**

A serving size is the recommended amount of a food that should be eaten by one person. It is important to pay attention to the serving size because the item you're eating may contain several servings. This means if you eat a bag of chips that contains three servings, you've eaten three times the calories, fat, etc.

#### **Calories/Calories from Fat**

This number indicates the number of calories, and calories which are derived from fat, contained in one serving of food. You should aim for getting

only about 30 percent of your daily calories from fat.

#### **Percent Daily Values**

These percentages tell you how one serving of food fits nutritionally into a daily diet of 2,000 calories.

#### **Nutrient List and Amounts**

Food companies must list — at a minimum — the amount of fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, sugars, protein, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron that are contained in one serving of the product. Some labels also display trans fat. These nutrients listed were chosen because they relate to current health concerns such as coronary artery disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. Your goal should be to consume no more than 100 percent of the daily value for fat, cholesterol and sodium, and at least 100 percent of the daily values for vitamins A and C, iron and calcium.

#### **Percent Daily Values Footnote**

This shows the maximum amounts of total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium, as well target amounts for total carbohydrates and fiber, that should be consumed each day. This is based on a suggested diet of 2,000 calories. Keep in mind that calorie amounts vary for each individual.

Food labels are a crucial part of designing healthy eating habits. They allow you to make informed choices about the foods you eat and compare foods. A good diet, in combination with exercise, can help your body stay healthy and disease-free.



### **Did you know...?**

Although most nutrients are measured in grams (g), some (such as sodium and cholesterol) are measured in milligrams (mg). There are 1,000 milligrams in a gram.

# USE THE NUTRITION FACTS LABEL TO EAT HEALTHIER

## Check the serving size and number of servings.

- The Nutrition Facts Label information is based on ONE serving, but many packages contain more. Look at the serving size and how many servings you are actually consuming. If you double the servings you eat, you double the calories and nutrients, including the % DVs.
- When you compare calories and nutrients between brands, check to see if the serving size is the same.

## Calories count, so pay attention to the amount.

- This is where you'll find the number of calories per serving and the calories from fat in each serving.
- Fat-free doesn't mean calorie-free. Lower fat items may have as many calories as full-fat versions.
- If the label lists that 1 serving equals 3 cookies and 100 calories, and you eat 6 cookies, you've eaten 2 servings, or twice the number of calories and fat.

## Look for foods that are rich in these nutrients.

- Use the label not only to limit fat and sodium, but also to increase nutrients that promote good health and may protect you from disease.
- Some Americans don't get enough vitamins A and C, potassium, calcium, and iron, so choose the brand with the higher % DV for these nutrients.
- Get the most nutrition for your calories—compare the calories to the nutrients you would be getting to make a healthier food choice.

# Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)  
Servings Per Container 2

## Amount Per Serving

**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

## The % Daily Value is a key to a balanced diet.

The % DV is a general guide to help you link nutrients in a serving of food to their contribution to your total daily diet. It can help you determine if a food is high or low in a nutrient—5% or less is low, 20% or more is high. You can use the % DV to make dietary trade-offs with other foods throughout the day. The \* is a reminder that the % DV is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. You may need more or less, but the % DV is still a helpful gauge.

## Know your fats and reduce sodium for your health.

- To help reduce your risk of heart disease, use the label to select foods that are lowest in saturated fat, *trans* fat and cholesterol.
- *Trans* fat doesn't have a % DV, but consume as little as possible because it increases your risk of heart disease.
- The % DV for total fat includes all different kinds of fats.
- To help lower blood cholesterol, replace saturated and *trans* fats with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats found in fish, nuts, and liquid vegetable oils.
- Limit sodium to help reduce your risk of high blood pressure.

## Reach for healthy, wholesome carbohydrates.

- Fiber and sugars are types of carbohydrates. Healthy sources, like fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains, can reduce the risk of heart disease and improve digestive functioning.
- Whole grain foods can't always be identified by color or name, such as multi-grain or wheat. Look for the "whole" grain listed first in the ingredient list, such as whole wheat, brown rice, or whole oats.
- There isn't a % DV for sugar, but you can compare the sugar content in grams among products.
- Limit foods with added sugars (sucrose, glucose, fructose, corn or maple syrup), which add calories but not other nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals. Make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few items in the ingredients list.

## For protein, choose foods that are lower in fat.

- Most Americans get plenty of protein, but not always from the healthiest sources.
- When choosing a food for its protein content, such as meat, poultry, dry beans, milk and milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat, or fat free.