Reading Food Labels

Foods that are in packaging or containers will often have a Nutrition Facts panel on its side or back. The Nutrition Facts panel provides the nutritional value of the food. This information is helpful when determining healthy food choices. By reading food labels, you will find out the serving size of a food and how many servings the package has. You will also find information about the calorie and fat content, as well as the amount of carbohydrate, and vitamins and minerals. Food labels are a great reference for you to use to learn about the food you are eating.

BREAKING DOWN THE FOOD LABEL

Serving Size: The serving size is an amount of food and is often listed in cups, weight, or units. All of the nutrition information about the food is listed according to the serving size. If you double the serving size, you must double the amounts on the label.
Servings per Container or Package: The number of servings in the container is listed here.
Calories: The number of calories in one serving is listed here. Everyone needs a different amount of calories each day. Having calories listed on the label is helpful information for people who would like to keep track of the number of calories they eat to stay at a healthy weight.
Calories from Fat: The number of calories that come from fat in one serving are listed here.

NUTRIENTS THAT ARE LISTED ON THE FOOD LABEL.

- **Percent Daily Value:** The food label helps you know if you are getting the amounts of nutrients you need each day by the percent daily value. It tells you how much of your daily values of each nutrient are provided by one serving of the food. The percent daily value is based on a 2000 calorie diet. You may need more or less than 2000 calories each day.
- **Total Fat:** The total amount of fat in one serving is listed here. The number is shown in grams (g). This information is important for people who want to keep track of the amount of fat in their diet. Foods with high amounts of fat usually have higher calories and may lead to weight gain.
- **Saturated Fat:** The amount of saturated fat in one serving is listed here. It is also shown in grams. Saturated fat is one type of fat that is found in food. It increases the amount of blood cholesterol more than other types of fat found in food. So saturated fat should be limited in the diet to less than 7 percent of total calories each day for most people. This means that if a person eats 2000 calories each day, they should eat less than 140 calories from saturated fat.
- **Trans Fat:** The amount of trans fat in one serving is listed here. It is also shown in grams. Trans fat is another type of fat that is found in food. It should also be limited to less than 2 grams per day because it increases blood cholesterol.
- **Cholesterol:** The amount of cholesterol in one serving is listed here. It is shown in milligrams (mg). Cholesterol should be limited to no more than 200 mg each day.
- **Sodium:** The amount of sodium in one serving is listed here. It is shown in milligrams. American Heart Association recommends that sodium should be limited to <1500mg/day. This recommended level of sodium was recently lowered from 2400mg/day.
- **Total Carbohydrate:** The amount of carbohydrate in one serving is listed here. It is shown in grams. This information is important for people with diabetes because they need to manage the amount of carbohydrate they eat. Carbohydrate changes the amount of glucose or sugar in the blood and diabetics do not want that amount to be too high or too low.
- **Dietary Fiber:** The amount of dietary fiber in one serving is listed here. It is shown in grams. Fiber is a type of carbohydrate. Most people should eat 25 grams of dietary fiber each day.
- **Sugars:** The amount of sugar in one serving is listed here. It is shown in grams. Sugars are also a type of carbohydrate. This value includes both naturally occurring sugars from fruit and milk and added sugars such as honey or table sugar.
- **Protein:** The amount of protein in one serving is listed here. It is shown in grams.
- **Vitamins and Minerals:** Food labels list vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron. They are all shown as a

percent of the daily need one serving of the food provides. For example, if 15% is listed next to iron it means that one serving of that food will give you 15% of the total amount of iron you need for one day.

- **Calories per Gram:** Some food labels will list the number of calories that are in each gram or protein, carbohydrate and fat. Protein has four calories per gram, carbohydrate has four calories per gram, and fat has 9 calories per gram.
- **Ingredients:** Food labels will list each ingredient in the food. The first ingredient listed is the ingredient that the food has the most of. The ingredients are listed in the order of their amount from highest to lowest.
- **Contains:** Food labels may also include this portion of the label as a food allergen warning. Listed here are ingredients that can cause allergies in some people. Examples of ingredients that are listed are wheat, dairy, eggs, soy and nuts. If a person knows that are allergic to one of these ingredients they will know not to eat the food in the container.

Information from www.eatright.org, Foodwise Nutritional Analysis Database, ADA Nutrition Care Manual.

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
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