

How do I read a food label?

The following is a quick guide to reading the Nutrition Facts Panel, or food label.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving size 1 cup (240 mL)			
Servings per container 2			
Amount per serving			
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110		
% Daily Value*			
Total fat 12g	18%		
Saturated Fat 3g	15%		
<i>Trans</i> Fat 1.5g			
Cholesterol 30mg	10%		
Sodium 470mg	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
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4			

Start here



Limit these nutrients



Get enough of these nutrients



Footnote



Quick guide to % DV

- 5% or less is low
- 20% or more is high



(Over for more details)

Start with the serving size

The serving size will tell you the amount of one serving and how many servings there are in the package. To count calories successfully, pay attention to the serving size on the label compared to what you actually eat. For example, if the serving size of macaroni and cheese is one cup, and you eat two cups, you are taking in twice the calories, fat and other nutrients listed on the food label.

Check out the total calories and calories from fat

While watching your weight, cut back on fat intake as well as calories. Fat has more calories than carbohydrates or protein, and your body prefers to use protein and carbohydrates for energy. One gram of fat has nine calories, and one gram of carbohydrates or protein has four calories. If you cut down on your fat intake, you will decrease your calorie intake as well.

Limit fat, cholesterol and sodium

Eating less fat, cholesterol and sodium may help reduce your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure and cancer. Total fat includes saturated, polyunsaturated, monounsaturated and trans fats. Saturated fat and trans fat are linked to an increased risk of heart disease, so limit these in your diet. Try to take in less fat overall because it is much higher in calories. To lose weight, you need to cut calories!

Get enough fiber, vitamins and minerals

Eat more fiber, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron to help reduce your risk of osteoporosis and anemia. Choose fruits and vegetables to get these nutrients.

Fiber fills you up and makes you feel full for longer, so you will eat less overall. Choose breads and crackers that have at least two grams of fiber per serving. Choose cereal and pasta that have at least four grams of fiber per serving. Eat brown rice instead of white to get even more fiber.

Footnote at the bottom of the label

You'll notice an asterisk after the heading "% Daily Value" on the label. This refers to the footnote at the bottom, which says, "Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs." This is on all food labels.

The chart just below (which is only legally required if the label is big enough) will always be the same, no matter what the product is. This chart shows recommended dietary advice for everyone. It's not about a specific food product. The chart tells you how much of a certain nutrient you should eat each day, based on a 2,000-calorie and a 2,500-calorie diet.

For example, if you eat 2,000 calories per day, your daily intake of total fat should be less than 65 grams. For Total Carbohydrate and Dietary Fiber, there is no indication in the Calories column, but you can mentally put "At least" in there. So for dietary fiber, you should eat at least 25 grams per day.

Percent Daily Values

The percent daily values listed on the right hand side of the food label are based on a 2,000-calorie diet. You can see if the food product is high or low in a certain nutrient and how much it contributes to your daily recommended allowance. Any nutrient that is 5% daily value or less is low, and any nutrient that is 20% daily value is high. For example, on the sample label, the total fat percent daily value is 18%. This means for one serving of this product, you'll get 18% of your daily requirement for total fat. This amount leaves you with 82% ($100 - 18 = 82$) of your fat allowance to come from all the other food you eat that day.

Ingredients list

Food companies must list the ingredients in descending order of predominance by weight. This means that the ingredient that weighs the most is first and the ingredient that weighs the least is last.

Get into the habit of reading food labels. It's a little box, but it's full of information. Reading the labels will help you balance your diet and get the nutrients you need each day.

