How to Read a Nutrition Facts Label

The Nutrition Facts label on food (Figure 1) contains information that can be helpful to people with diabetes.

**Serving Size**

Compare this to the serving size listed with the Diabetes Food Guide Pyramid. For example, the serving size listed on a bottle of orange juice is 8 oz, but the serving size listed with the Diabetes Food Guide is 1/2 cup, which is 4 oz. You may need to make adjustments so that you are comparing similar serving sizes.

**Servings Per Container**

Look carefully at the number of servings per container. The amount of calories and nutrients listed on the label applies to one serving, not necessarily to the full quantity of food in the container.

**Amount Per Serving**

The amount of calories and nutrients listed on the label applies to one serving, not necessarily to the full quantity of food in the container.

**Calories**

Calories are a measure of the amount of energy in food. You can compare the amount of calories in similar products if the serving sizes are the same.

**Total Fat**

Look at both the amount of calories and the amount of total fat when comparing the regular and low fat versions of a food. Low fat doesn’t necessarily mean low calorie.

**Saturated Fat**

Look for foods with less saturated and trans fats. Choose the leanest cuts of meat.

**Cholesterol intake should be 300 mg or less per day.**

**Look for foods that contain 400 mg of sodium or less per serving.**

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**Figure 1. Nutrition Facts label, french fries**

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Trans Fat
Trans fat is found mainly in processed foods. Trans fat also raises total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels in the blood. Trans fat is now listed on the label. Look for foods with little or no trans fat.

Cholesterol
Cholesterol is found in animal-based foods. Cholesterol intake should be 300 mg or less per day.

Sodium
In general, sodium intake should be less than 2,400 mg per day. Look for foods that contain 400 mg of sodium or less per serving. For a frozen convenience dinner or entree, look for one that contains 800 mg of sodium or less. People with kidney disease may need to have a lower daily sodium intake.

Total Carbohydrate
This is probably the most important information for a person with diabetes. Remember that 15 grams of carbohydrate is a serving. By looking at the grams of total carbohydrate in a food, you can figure out how many servings of carbohydrate it has. Most foods don’t have exactly 15 grams of carbohydrate. Table 1 can be helpful in estimating carbohydrate servings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carbohydrate servings</th>
<th>Target grams of carbohydrates</th>
<th>Range of grams of carbohydrates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23–37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38–52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53–65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dietary Fiber
A food that contains 5 grams of fiber or more per serving is considered high fiber. A food that contains 2.5 to 4.9 grams of fiber per serving is considered a good source of fiber.

Sugars
A food product that states “no added sugar” or “sugar-free” can still contain other carbohydrates. Look at Total Carbohydrate, not just at Sugars, to see if a food will raise blood sugar.

Protein
Meats contain saturated fat and cholesterol as well as protein. Choose the leanest cuts of meat. Choose low-fat cooking methods for meat, poultry and fish. People with kidney disease may need to restrict the amount of protein they eat each day.

Where to go for more information
- Your health care provider
- American Diabetes Association:
  1-800-DIABETES
- National Diabetes Education Program:
  1-800-438-5383
  or visit the World Wide Web at ndep.nih.gov or www.cdc.gov
- Your county Extension office

This publication was made possible by grants from New Mexico State University’s Cooperative Extension Service and the Diabetes Prevention and Control Program.

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October 2007  Las Cruces, NM

This publication is scheduled to be updated and reissued October 2012.