

Nutrition Labels

Guide E-136

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Nutrition labels on processed food were first used in the 1970s to furnish consumers with nutrient information. Now, nutrition labels provide even more useful information (fig. 1).

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 260	Calories from Fat 120
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 4%	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15%	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	

Product-specific information

Footnotes. Information is consistent whenever these footnotes appear.

- Servings per container.
- Total calories per serving.
- Total calories from fat per serving.
- “Daily values” of total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrate, and dietary fiber per serving. Daily values are based on current nutrition recommendations for a 2,000-calorie diet.
- If package size allows, a footnote lists recommended daily values for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrate, and dietary fiber for diets of both 2,000 and 2,500 calories.
- Ingredients listed from most to least according to weight.
- Percentages of vitamins A and C and as well as percentages of the minerals calcium and iron needed to fulfill the daily value recommendations. Food companies may voluntarily list other vitamins and minerals.
- Figures that allow consumers to calculate calories per gram from fat, carbohydrates, and protein. (Rounding these figures occasionally results in a small discrepancy.)
- If a label uses a term such as “free,” “low,” “reduced,” or “light,” the food must conform to standardized requirements for using those terms.
- If a label makes health claims, the claims must meet specific nutrient levels or fulfill other nutrition requirements as determined by FDA or USDA.

Figure 1. New nutrition label format.

The Nutritional Labeling and Education Act of 1990 (NLEA) requires that food labels follow a standard format and provide this nutrition information:

- Standardized serving sizes based upon the amount of food the average person usually eats at one time.

NLEA permits a simplified label format for foods that contain insignificant amounts of seven or more major nutrients (fig. 2). The simplified label, commonly used on vegetable oils and soft drinks, must include the serving size, total calories, total fat, sodium, total carbohydrates and sugars, and protein.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Tbsp (14g)	
Servings Per Container 64	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 130	Calories from Fat 130
%Daily Value*	
Total Fat 14g	22%
Saturated Fat 2g	10%
Polyunsaturated Fat 4g	
Monounsaturated Fat 8g	
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 0g	0%
Protein 0g	
Not a significant source of cholesterol, dietary fiber, sugars, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron.	
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.	

FDA Simplified Format (Vegetable Oil)

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 can (360mL)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 140	
%Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Sodium 20mg	1%
Total Carbohydrate 36g	12%
Sugars 36 g	
Protein 0g	0%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.	

FDA Simplified Format (Soft Drink)

Figure 2. Simplified formats.

Voluntary nutrition labeling is recommended for the 20 most commonly consumed raw fruits, vegetables, and fish. Grocery stores may use posters or leaflets to provide nutrition information.

Health Claims on Labels

Food labels may carry health claims if carefully controlled research has verified a nutrient's contribution to good health. For example, a dairy product label may claim that eating the product may reduce the incidence of osteoporosis. Health claims may be made for the relationships between these nutrients and diseases:

- Calcium and osteoporosis
- Fiber-containing grain products, fruits, vegetables and cancer
- Fruits and vegetables and cancer
- Fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain fiber and coronary heart disease
- Fat and cancer
- Saturated fat and cholesterol and coronary heart disease

- Sodium and hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Folate and neural tube defects (certain birth defects of the brain and spinal cord)
- Dietary sugar alcohol and dental caries
- Soluble fiber from certain foods and risk of coronary heart disease
- Soy protein and risk of coronary heart disease
- Plant sterol/stanol esters (added to foods like margarine and salad dressing) and risk of coronary heart disease
- Whole grain foods and risk of heart disease and certain cancers
- Potassium and the risk of high blood pressure and stroke

Health claims coupled with the nutrition information on labels can help you select a healthy diet. For example, a person with diabetes can use nutrition information to manage their intake of fat, sugar, sodium, and dietary fiber. (Note that the serving size on the diabetic exchange list differs from the serving size on a food label.)

Table 1. Adjusted percent daily values for various calorie levels

Nutrient		Calories					
		1,600	2,000	2,200	2,500	2,800	3,200
Total fat	less than	52 g	65 g	72 g	80 g	91 g	104g
Saturated fat	less than	13 g	20 g	22 g	25 g	28 g	32g
Cholesterol	less than	300 mg	300 mg	300 mg	300 mg	300 mg	300mg
Sodium	less than	2,400 mg	2,400 mg	2,400 mg	2,400 mg	2,400 mg	2,400 mg
Total carbohydrates		240 g	300 g	330 g	375 g	420 g	480g
Dietary fiber		16 g	25 g	28 g	30 g	35 g	40g
Protein		40 g	50 g	55 g	63 g	70 g	80 g

A person with heart disease can use information on fat, saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol so they can select a heart-healthy diet. Using nutrition information, consumers can easily select foods low in fat and high in dietary fiber, vitamin A, and vitamin C to reduce their cancer risk.

Exemptions to Nutrition Labels

While almost all processed foods must have nutrition labels, these foods are exempt:

- Foods with no nutritional significance (plain coffee, tea, and most spices).
- Restaurant foods.
- Foods sold in bulk form (not for sale to consumers).
- Foods served for immediate consumption (as in hospitals, cafeterias, or airplanes).
- Foods prepared on-site in food stores (deli, bakery, and candy store items).
- Foods sold by food service vendors (mall cookie counters, sidewalk vendors, and vending machines).
- Foods in very small packages (less than 12 square inches). However, the manufacturer must provide a telephone number or an address for consumers to obtain nutrition information.
- Foods produced by small businesses.
- Medical foods

Calculating Percent Daily Values

Use nutrient and daily value information on labels to that assure you and your family get enough nutrients for growing and maintaining your health. The standard nutrition label provides daily values for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, dietary fiber, and protein for 2000- and 2500-calorie diets, but what if your diet is not a 2000-or 2500-calorie diet? Table 1 shows adjusted percent daily values for diets with more and fewer calories.

Nutrition labels, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and the Food Guide Pyramid are a valuable team to consumers seeking a healthy diet. For additional information, contact your county Extension office or the USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center, Web sites: www.nalusda.gov/fnic/ and FDA Web site: www.fda.gov.

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