

Patient Education

Food and Nutrition



Reading Nutrition Labels

This handout explains the information on the Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size ½ cup (114g)	
Servings Per Container 4	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 90	Calories from Fat 30
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 3g	5%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 300mg	13%
Total Carbohydrate 13g	4%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 3g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 80%	Vitamin C 60%
Calcium 4%	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	

Sample nutrition label

UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

Nutrition Label Information

Amounts listed on the nutrition label may be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Serving Size and Number of Servings

Under “Nutrition Facts,” you will find the serving size that is used for the nutrition information on the label. Right under this is the number of servings in the container. Similar food products give similar serving sizes to make it easier to compare foods. Remember that:

- Some “individual” packages contain more than 1 serving per container.
- Serving sizes are based on amounts people are advised to eat, but they may be smaller than the portions we actually eat.

% Daily Value

This column shows how the food fits into a 2,000-calorie diet. You can use “% Daily Value” to compare foods and see how the amount of a nutrient in a serving of each food fits into your diet. Of course, you may need more or less than 2,000 calories per day.

Vitamins and Minerals

Only 2 vitamins (A and C) and 2 minerals (calcium and iron) are required to be listed on the food label. A food company can also list other vitamins and minerals that are in the food, if they wish.

Daily Values Footnote

“Daily Values” are the label reference numbers. These values are set by the U.S. government and are based on current recommendations. Some labels list 2 daily values, one for a 2,000-calorie diet and another for a 2,500-calorie diet. Your own nutrient needs may be more or less than the daily values on the label.

Calories per Gram Footnote

Some labels tell the number of calories in a gram of fat, carbohydrate, and protein.

Why do some food packages have a short or abbreviated nutrition label?

Foods that have only a few of the nutrients required on the standard label can use a short label format. What is on the label depends on what is in the food. Small- and medium-sized packages can also use a short label.

Trans Fat

Trans fat, also known as trans fatty acids, is a type of fat that forms when liquid oils are made into solid fats. Trans fat raises LDL, or “bad” cholesterol, which increases your risk of heart disease.

Listing trans fats on nutrition labels became a requirement in the U.S. in 2006. If a product contains less than 0.5 grams trans fat per serving, the label can say 0 grams trans fat. But, if you have more than 1 serving of the product, you may be eating an amount of trans fat that can affect your health. The words “partially hydrogenated” in the ingredients list tells you the food contains hidden trans fats.

Trans fat is usually found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, and processed and fried foods such as crackers, cookies, and snack foods. Foods labeled “zero trans fat” may still contain high amounts of other kinds of fat, calories, and sodium.

New Label Terms

Term	Description
Free	Contains a very small amount of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugar, and/or calories. For example, “calorie-free” means fewer than 5 calories per serving, and can be labeled as 0 calories.
Low Fat	Contains no more than 3 grams of fat per serving.
Low Saturated Fat	Contains no more than 1 gram of saturated fat per serving.
Low Sodium	Has less than 140 mg of sodium per serving.
Very Low Sodium	Contains less than 35 mg of sodium per serving.
Low Cholesterol	Contains less than 20 mg of cholesterol per serving.
Lean (meat, poultry, seafood, game meats)	Contains less than 4 grams saturated fat and less than 95 mg cholesterol per serving and per 100 grams (about 3.5 ounces).
Extra Lean	Contains less than 5 grams of fat, less than 2 grams saturated fat, and less than 95 mg cholesterol per serving and per 100 grams (about 3.5 ounces).
High	Contains 20% or more of the Daily Value for a specific nutrient per serving.
Good Source	Contains 10% to 19% of the Daily Value for a specific nutrient per serving.

Term	Description
Reduced or Less	The food contains at least 25% less of a nutrient or calories than the regular product. Reduced-fat mayonnaise is one example. This term applies to calories, sodium, fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and total sugars.
Light or "Lite"	Refers to fat and sodium: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $\frac{1}{3}$ fewer calories or $\frac{1}{2}$ as much fat as the regular food. If the food gets more than half of its calories from fat, the fat must be reduced by at least 50%. • 50% less sodium than the reference food. <p>Note: The term "light" can also be used to describe things such as texture and color, as long as the label explains this. For example, "light" brown sugar has the same number of calories as dark brown sugar. It is just a lighter color.</p>
More	Contains at least 10% more of a nutrient than the regular food per serving. Also applies to fortified, enriched, and other claims for altered foods.
% Fat Free	Is low-fat or fat-free. The percentage on the label reflects the amount of fat in 100 grams of the food.
0 Grams Trans Fat	May contain up to 0.49 grams of trans fat per serving.

Label Reading for Special Diets

Low-Fat and Low-Cholesterol Diets

If the food you are planning to eat is the main part of your meal, then 3 to 10 grams of fat is OK. Add low-fat milk, fruit, and vegetables to complete your meal.

But, if you plan to eat other high-fat foods at the same meal, be careful to limit your portion sizes. Know the total number of fat grams you should eat in a day, and also know your limit on saturated fat. If you are following a low-fat diet, your doctor may have advised you to get less than 30% of your daily calories from fat. Ask your dietitian to help you use this advice to create a meal plan that works for you.

Here are some basic guidelines to follow:

- Allow 3 grams of fat for every 100 calories – or, choose foods that have less than 5 grams of fat per ounce.
- Limit cholesterol intake to 300 grams per day.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Dietitian or Diet Technician:

This chart gives an idea of how many fat grams to have each day, based on diets of 1,800, 2,000, and 2,400 calories per day:

Total Calories	Total Fat Grams	Saturated Fat Grams
1,800	60	14
2,000	67	15
2,400	80	18

Salt/Sodium-Restricted Diets

When you read labels, you will see that the sodium content is listed in milligrams (mg). One teaspoon of sodium chloride (table salt) contains about 2,300 mg of sodium. Your doctor will advise you on how much sodium you may have per day.

Low-Carbohydrate Diets

This table turns carbohydrate grams into carbohydrate (CHO) choices. Remember, you do not need to count grams of sugar – only the grams of Total Carbohydrate.

Total CHO Grams	0 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 20	21 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 65	66 to 70	71 to 80
Equals	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
CHO Choices	0	½	1	1½	2	2½	3	3½	4	4½	5

To calculate carbohydrate choices:

1. Read the Nutrition Facts label and find out the serving size.
2. Find out the Total Carbohydrate grams.
3. Turn the grams into choices using the chart directly above.

Example:

- The nutrition label says that the serving size is ½ cup, and the Total Carbohydrate per serving is 13 grams.
- You plan to eat 1 cup, which is 2 servings. That means you will eat 26 grams of carbohydrate (13 grams x 2 = 26), which is equal to 2 carbohydrate choices (see the middle area of the chart that shows Total CHO Grams of 26 to 35 is equal to 2 CHO choices).

UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

Food and Nutrition

Box 356057
1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195

© University of Washington Medical Center
Published: 06/2006, 05/2011
Clinician Review: 05/2011

Reprints on Health Online: <http://healthonline.washington.edu>