

READING FOR GOOD EATING

Serving Size: This is the first place to start. Serving sizes are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amounts. Serving sizes are based on the amount of food people typically eat. Pay attention to the serving size, including how many servings there are in the food package, and compare it to how much YOU actually eat. The size of the serving on the food package influences all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. In the sample label for macaroni & cheese, one serving of this particular food is 1 cup. If you ate the whole package, you would eat two cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers.

Calories: Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of food. Oftentimes, calories are overlooked. Most people tend to focus on fat or carbohydrate content instead of calories. It is important to remember that eating too many calories is linked to overweight and obesity. In our food label example, there are 250 calories in one serving of macaroni and cheese. If we ate the whole container, we would have consumed 500 calories!

Total Fat, Cholesterol and Sodium: Americans generally tend to eat these nutrients in adequate amounts, or even too much. Eating too much fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases. Health experts recommend that you keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced eating style.

Total Carbohydrates and Sugars: Total carbohydrate on the label includes sugar, complex carbohydrates, and fiber. Keep in mind the sugars listed include naturally occurring sugars, as well as those added to a food or drink. Check the ingredient list for specifics on added sugars. If you look only at the sugar number, you may end up excluding nutritious foods such as fruits and milks thinking they are too high in sugar. You may also overeat foods such as cereals and grains, thinking that they have no natural or added sugar, but do contain a lot of carbohydrate.

Dietary Fiber: Did you know the average American gets in only 15 grams of fiber a day! Health experts recommend a minimum of 25 grams a day for health benefits. Look for foods containing 3 grams of fiber or more per serving. (Refer to fiber handout for more information).

Calcium: American often fall short of their calcium needs. Getting enough calcium can reduce the risk of osteoporosis, in which bones become brittle and break as one ages. It is easy to tell how much calcium is in a serving of food. Simply drop the percent sign and add a zero. In our macaroni and cheese example, one serving has 200 mg of calcium.

At first glance, the food label, with all of its numbers and percentages, may look intimidating. As you become familiar with the format, you will see how the food label can be an important tool in deciding which foods fit into a healthy lifestyle. Use the sample label below to see what features to look for when examining food labels.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Serving Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans 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

TRANS FAT – WHEN GOOD FAT GOES BAD

We're used to thinking of saturated fat as the "bad" fat. Now we know the solution created to replace saturated fat in many foods may actually be worse – trans fat. Studies suggest that it may be as bad for your heart as saturated fat. Not only does it increase your bad cholesterol (LDL), it also decreases healthy cholesterol (HDL).

What is trans fat?

Trans fat is formed by taking a mainly unsaturated liquid fat, like vegetable oil, and transforming it into a solid fat by adding hydrogen. This process is known as "partial hydrogenation." When added to foods, it gives them a longer shelf life and a crispy, flaky texture.

How much is too much?

The Institute of Medicine has determined there is no safe level of trans fat and consumption should be as low as possible. Choose products with 0 grams trans fat. Foods with less than 0.5 grams can be labeled as having 0 grams trans fat, so check the ingredient list for any partially hydrogenated oil in the product to avoid all trans fat.

How can I avoid trans fat?

- Eat a primarily whole foods diet and avoid processed foods.
- Cook with olive or canola oil instead of margarine or shortening.
- Switch to trans-free margarines, like Promise® or SmartBeat®, or soft or liquid versions, which have less trans fat.
- If purchasing packaged foods like crackers, cookies, frozen entrees, etc., be sure to choose items that don't list "hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils" in their ingredients.
- Be aware that fried foods, crackers, pies, cookies and other packaged foods are typically made with partially hydrogenated oils.
- Choose foods that are low in fat. They are generally low in trans fat as well.

NUTRIENT CLAIMS

Free – a product contains no amount of, or only a trivial amount, of one or more of these components: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugars, and calories.

Low Fat – 3 grams of fat or less per serving.

Low Sodium – 140 mg of sodium or less per serving.

Very Low Sodium – 35 mg of sodium or less per serving.

Low Cholesterol – 20 mg of cholesterol or less per serving.

Low Calorie – 40 calories or less per serving.

Good Source – One serving of a food contains 10 to 19 percent of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient.

Reduced – a nutritionally altered product contains at least 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than the regular, or reference, product.

Less – a food, whether altered or not, contains 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than the reference food.