

Food Labeling 101

Reading a food label can help you make smarter food choices. Most foods list nutrition information on the package label. These are called "Nutrition Facts." These facts can help you compare foods and choose the best and healthiest option.

The **serving size** is a measured amount of food. In the sample label, the serving size is one cup, and there are two servings per container. If you ate the whole container, you would eat two cups, which doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers. Check the serving size on food labels to determine if the number of servings you are eating is smaller or larger. This will help you stay within your daily calorie goal.

The number of **calories** is the total amount of energy the food provides. Pay attention to calories. If you eat more calories than your body uses, over time you will gain weight. Another important part of the label is the number of calories from fat. You should limit the number of calories from fat to 20-35% of your total daily calories. In the sample label, there are 250 calories in one serving and 110 calories from fat. This means almost 50% of the calories in a single serving of this food come from fat. Due to its high-fat content, this food is not a healthy choice.

Americans typically eat too much-saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium. **These are things that you will want to limit.** Eating too much can increase the risk of heart disease, cancer, or diabetes. Total fat is important to watch, but saturated fat and trans fat are particularly bad for you. They may raise your blood cholesterol level, which can increase your risk of heart disease. Choose foods containing less than 10% of calories from saturated fat.

Aim to get more fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in your diet. Eating enough of these nutrients can reduce your risk for certain cancers, osteoporosis, or hypertension. It is recommended to consume 100% of each of these nutrients daily to prevent nutrition-related diseases.

Understanding the **Percent Daily Values (% DV)** on a food label can help you choose foods high in good nutrients and low in bad nutrients. The % DV is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. If you eat less than 2,000 calories a day, your daily value may be lower than what is listed on the label. If you eat more than 2,000 calories a day, your daily value may be higher. Remember, 5% DV or less is low and 20% or more is high. Choose foods with a low % DV for fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, or sodium.

The footnote refers to the Percent Daily Value, mentioned in number five. It states that the percentages are based on a 2,000-calorie diet, which does not change from product to product. This footnote also reminds consumers of the daily intake of different recommended nutrients depending on their caloric needs

