



Understanding Food Labels

Understanding food labels makes it easier to stay on track with your health and nutrition goals, but the information found on food labels can be confusing. To add to the confusion, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration revised its rules for food labeling in 2016, giving manufacturers until July 2018 to comply with the rules. The current label is on the left, while the new label is on the right. As a consumer, you will likely see both of these food labels on packaged goods until July 2018. This handout walks you through the steps of reading both of these food labels.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 2/3 cup (55g) Servings Per Container About 8	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 230	Calories from Fat 72
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	12%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	16%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A	10%
Vitamin C	8%
Calcium	20%
Iron	45%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily value 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

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)	
Amount per serving	
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% Daily Value*	
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Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

- 1 This section of a food label contains information about the amount of food in the package. Labels indicate two things: the number of servings in the entire package, and the average serving size. Serving sizes are shown in two measurements: standard (cups) and metric (grams). In this example, the package contains 8 servings of food. One serving is equal to $\frac{2}{3}$ cup, or 55 grams.
- 2 This section contains information about the number of **calories** in one serving of this food. Calories are units of energy generated by the food. **Calories from fat** are shown on old labels to indicate how much of the energy in each serving of food comes from fat.
- 3 Nutritional content is listed next. Figures are shown in grams for total fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, and protein. Some of these nutrient categories have subcategories. Under fat, two categories are listed:
 - **Saturated fat:** Saturated fat was once thought to be harmful, but current evidence suggests that it is not as bad as it once seemed. Still, some people may want or need to limit their intake.
 - **Trans fat:** Trans fats lead to insulin resistance, inflammation, belly fat accumulation, and increased risk of heart disease. These fats should be avoided. Note that a food label can list the trans-fat content as zero, as long as the amount of trans fat contained in one serving of the product is less than 0.5 g. To be sure a food is free of trans fat, look at the ingredient list. Trans fats are often listed as “hydrogenated” or “partially-hydrogenated” fats or oils.

Under total carbohydrates, two subcategories are listed:

- **Fiber:** Fiber is a carbohydrate, but it can't be broken down by the body. Because of this, fiber is usually subtracted from the total carbohydrate value to determine a food's net carbohydrate value.
- **Total sugars (or sugars):** Total sugars include both naturally occurring sugars and added sugars. The current label shows total sugar only, but the new label must show the amount of total sugar and disclose any added sugar in a given serving of food.

4 In the next nutrient subsection, micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) in the food are listed. The new food label shows the actual amount (in micrograms) of these vitamins and minerals, while the old label does not. Most old food labels list Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Calcium, and Iron. The new labels list Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium. Vitamins A and C appear on the current label because deficiencies were common when the label was first created. Now those deficiencies are rare in the general population. Instead, Vitamin D and Potassium deficiencies are more common now. For all nutrients and micronutrients, the Percent Daily Value (DV) is shown to the right. DVs are an indication of how much that nutrient contributes to a day's worth of food. All DVs are based on a diet of 2,000 calories per day.

Decoding Ingredient Lists

In the ingredients list of a food label, ingredients are listed in order of largest to smallest amounts. This means that the ingredient that weighs the most is listed first, and the ingredients that weigh the least are listed last.

The ingredient list is particularly important if you have food allergies or sensitivities, as many packaged foods can have hidden sources of common allergens. The eight most common food allergens include eggs, milk, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, wheat (gluten), and soy. These ingredients, and any ingredients derived from them, are required by U.S. law to be listed on all food labels. While they will be listed in the ingredients, they may also appear in a statement immediately after the list (e.g., "Contains wheat, milk, and soy"). The table below provides additional examples of how these foods might be listed in ingredient lists.

Food Allergen	May be listed as, or may be the source of...
Eggs	Albumin (or albumen), egg (dried, powdered, solids, white, yolk), eggnog, lysozyme, mayonnaise, meringue (meringue powder), ovalbumin, surimi
Fish	Fish meal, fish oil, fish sauce, surimi, specific species of fish (e.g., bass, cod, flounder, etc.)
Milk	Buttermilk solids, casein, caseinate, galactose, hydrolysate, lactate, lactose, milk (dried, malted, powdered, solids, etc.), quark, rennet, whey
Peanuts	Arachic oil, beer nuts, cold-pressed, extruded or expelled peanut oil, earth nuts, hydrolyzed peanut protein, mixed nuts, Nu nuts, nut pieces, nutmeat, peanut (butter, flour, paste, sauce, etc.)
Shellfish	Barnacle, fish stock, seafood flavoring, surimi, specific type of crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, crawfish, krill, lobster, prawns, or shrimp)
Soy	Bean curd, edamame, hydrolyzed soy protein, kinako, miso, natto, okara, soy (albumin, concentrate, fiber, grits, milk, miso, nuts, sauce, flour, etc.), soybeans, soy lecithin, tamari, tempeh, textured vegetable protein, tofu
Tree nuts	Artificial flavoring, nut butters, nut meal, nutmeat, nut oil, nut pieces, any ingredient made with a specific type of tree nut (e.g., almond, cashew, pecan, walnut, etc.)
Wheat (gluten)	Dextrin, maltodextrin, modified food starch, textured vegetable protein, specific strains of wheat (e.g., durum wheat, club wheat, spelt, semolina, Einkorn, emmer, kamut, and triticale) (Note that "wheat-free" does not mean "gluten-free", as "wheat-free" products may contain barley, rye, or oats. If you are sensitive to gluten, be sure to avoid products containing barley, rye, and oats.)

Note that allergen-free packaged foods may still contain trace amounts if they are made on shared equipment. Some manufacturers include advisory statements on their products if they are made in a facility that also processes a major food allergen (e.g., “packaged in a plant that also processes wheat”). Regardless of the severity of your food allergies or sensitivities, always take care to read the ingredient list thoroughly so you don’t accidentally trigger an adverse food reaction.

What About Sugar?

Some packaged foods that are made almost entirely of sugar might not list the first ingredient as sugar, which can be misleading. In some cases, many different types of sugar are included in one product. Each of those types of sugar is listed separately according to its weight, but when added together, those sugars may make up the majority of the product. Other names for sugar—and different types of sugar—to look for on food labels include:

Acesulfame, advantame, aspartame, agave, agave nectar, anhydrous dextrose, cane crystals, cane juice, corn sweetener, corn syrup solids, dates, dextrose, dulcin, Equal, erythritol, evaporated cane juice, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, glucin, glucose, honey, juice, liquid fructose, lactose, maltose, maple syrup, molasses, neotame, Nutrasweet, nutrinova, saccharin, sorghum syrup, Splenda, stevia, sucanat, sucralose, sucrose, sugar (brown, cane, coconut, date, granulated, invert, powdered, raw, turbinado, white, etc.), Sweet N’ Low, Sweetmyx, syrup (brown rice, cane, corn, high-fructose corn, flavored, malt, etc.), Truvia, Twinsweet, and xylitol.