

Using Food Labels by Sarah Remmer article published on Fitnutconsulting.com May 2008

Have you ever wondered what that box with all the numbers on the side of your cereal box really means? That is the nutrition label! It tells us what ingredients are in that item and how nutritious it is. For example, it tells us how many calories one serving has, how many grams of fat (and what kind of fat) it has and if it contains fibre or not. At first, these labels are confusing and perhaps frustrating to figure out. But when you become familiar with reading food labels and knowing what to look for, you suddenly become empowered with the knowledge to make healthier choices at the grocery store! This will also help you to better manage any blood sugar, blood pressure or blood cholesterol problems, or it may just allow you to eat a healthier more balanced diet. Fitnut's Dietitians lead shopping tours in your grocery stores. These tours give you a chance to learn more about label reading. Read on to find out how to read a nutrition label!

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 3 oz (85g)	
Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 180	Calories from Fat 90
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 40g	20%
Trans Fat 0.5g	
Cholesterol 70mg	23%
Sodium 60mg	3%
Total Carbohydrate 0g	0%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 22g	
Vitamin A 0%	• Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 2%	• Iron 15%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your caloric needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated 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	

Ingredient List

Look for ingredient lists on food packages. The ingredient list provides an overview of what is in the food. Ingredients are listed by weight from the most abundant ingredient to the least abundant ingredient. Ingredient lists are also useful for people with food allergies or intolerances or those who avoid or limit certain ingredients in foods.

Nutrient Content Claims

Nutrient content claims tell you about important nutritional features of a food. A food must meet government standards before it can display a content claim about a nutrient. A nutrient content claim can also highlight a relationship between what you eat and different diseases. For example:

- "A healthy diet rich in a variety of vegetables and fruit may help reduce the risk of some types of cancer".
- "A healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats may reduce the risk of heart disease".

Carbohydrate

Carbohydrates are used in the body for energy. They are found in most foods. Fruit, vegetables, whole grain products and legumes (beans and lentils) should be the main source of carbohydrates and fibre in your diet.

Sugar is also a carbohydrate. Limit how much added sugar you eat in foods. Use the nutrition facts panel to compare products and choose the one with the least amount of sugar and the most fibre.

Fibre

Many carbohydrate containing foods, like fruit, vegetables and whole-grain products contain fibre. We need to eat fibre because:

- Having a high-fibre eating pattern protects against chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.
- High-fibre food helps you to feel full. This may help you to control your weight.
- Eating high-fibre food helps to prevent constipation.
- Eating high-fibre food helps control the levels of sugar and fat in your blood.



Use the nutrition facts panel to choose products that are higher in fibre. **A food is high in fibre if it has a % Daily Value of at least 15%.** To protect against heart disease the average woman needs about 25 g of fibre daily (14 g of fibre for every 1000 calories they eat) and the average man needs about 38 g of fibre daily. Most Canadians only eat half of this amount.

Fats

Eating too much saturated and trans fat may raise your "bad" blood cholesterol. This will increase your risk of heart disease. Read ingredient lists and avoid foods that use the words: shortening, hard margarine, butter, partially hydrogenated oils, lard, coconut oil, or palm oil. When liquid oil is changed into a solid this is called hydrogenation. Hydrogenation causes trans fat to be formed. Foods like margarine, crackers, and cookies often contain "hydrogenated fat".

Foods should have a % Daily Value for saturated and trans fats less than 10%.

If you are trying to limit your fat intake you can also look at the fat grams on the nutrition facts panel. This will help you choose the product with the lowest fat grams. The average women should eat less than 56 grams of fat daily and the average man should eat less than 82 grams of fat daily. This is based on a diet that provides less than 30% of its calories from fat.

Nutrition Facts Panel

The nutrition facts panel provides information on serving size, calories and at least 13 different nutrients in an easy to read table. Use the nutrition facts panel to compare similar foods. Choose foods that are higher in fibre, and lower in sugar, salt and fat.

The information in this panel is based on one serving of food. Look at the serving size listed on the nutrition facts panel. If you eat more or less than the listed serving size you have to adjust the nutrient content listed below. For example, if you were to eat half of this muffin you would divide all the nutrient values in half.

Calories are the amount of energy in 1 serving.

Fat is the total amount of fat in 1 serving. 5 g of fat is equal to 1 tsp of fat.

Saturated and **trans fats** are part of the total amount of fat. These fats raise the "bad" blood cholesterol. Choose foods that are lower in saturated and trans fats.

Fibre helps to promote a healthy heart and control blood sugars. Choose foods that are higher in fibre.

Use **% Daily Value** to see if a food has a little or a lot of a nutrient compared to what is recommended.