

Food Labels: The Breakdown

What do they really say?

As you eat your cereal in the morning, you notice it on the side of the box - that rectangle with the jumble of words, numbers, and percentages. It's the Nutrition Facts label, and it breaks down what's inside the box — everything from calories to cholesterol. Reading this label can be a little confusing, but by breaking it down, you'll have a clear understanding of the value the information provides in helping you maintain a healthy diet.

Serving Size

A serving size is based on the amount of food people typically eat. It is important to pay attention to the serving size because the item you're eating may contain several servings. This means if you eat a bag of chips that contains three servings, you've eaten three times the calories, fat, etc.

Calories/Calories from Fat

This number indicates the amount of calories, and calories which are derived from fat, contained in one serving of food. You should aim for getting

only about 30% of your daily calories from fat.

Percent Daily Values

These percentages tell you how one serving of food fits nutritionally into a daily diet of 2,000 calories.

Nutrient List and Amounts

Food companies must list – at a minimum – the amount of fats, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, sugars, protein, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron that are contained in one serving of the product. Some labels also display trans fat. These nutrients listed were chosen because they relate to current health concerns such as coronary artery disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity. Your goal should be to consume no more than 100 percent of the daily value for fat, cholesterol, and sodium, and at least 100 percent of the daily values for vitamins A and C, iron and calcium.

Percent Daily Values Footnote

This shows the maximum amounts of total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium, as well target amounts for total carbohydrates and fiber, that should be consumed each day. This is based on a suggested diet of 2,000 calories. Keep in mind that calorie amounts vary for each individual.

Food labels are a crucial part of designing healthy eating habits. They allow you to make informed choices about the foods you eat and compare foods. A good diet, in combination with exercise, can help your body stay healthy and disease-free.



Did you know...?

Although most nutrients are measured in grams (g), some (such as sodium and cholesterol) are measured in milligrams (mg). There are 1,000 milligrams in a gram.

Sample Food Label

Fat should amount to no more than 30% of your daily calories. Based on a 2,000-calorie diet, this would equate to no more than 600 calories from fat for the entire day.

This serving size is 1 cake, but 5 cakes come in the package. If you eat them all, you need to multiply all of the following nutrition facts by 5.

While it's good that this product has no trans fat, it has significant saturated fat. Less than 10% of your daily calories should come from saturated fat – this product already provides a quarter of what you should consume in 1 day.

The following percentages represent how much this product counts toward the recommended daily amount. It is based on 2,000 calories.

This product would not be a good choice if you were following a low-carb diet.

This product is quite high in sugar. While there is no FDA "recommended daily amount" since you should avoid it, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services suggests staying below 32g a day – or 8 teaspoons.

Your goal should be to consume 100% of these vitamins and nutrients per day. This product would not be a good choice for helping to meet that goal.

Amount Per Serving		% Daily Value*	
Calories 200 Calories from Fat 90			
Total Fat 10g			15%
Saturated Fat 5g			25%
Trans Fat 0g			
Cholesterol 0mg			0%
Sodium 100mg			4%
Total Carbohydrate 26g			9%
Dietary Fiber 0g			0%
Sugars 19g			
Protein 1g			
Vitamin A 0%	•	Vitamin C 0%	
Calcium 0%	•	Iron 2%	
* 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

Every food label attaches this information at the end. It is a summary of the recommended total amounts you should consume each day – based on either a 2,000-calorie or 2,500-calorie diet.