

Understanding Today's Food Label

Big changes were made in the last decade on food package labels. New federal guidelines went into effect in early 1993.

The Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for ensuring that meat and poultry labels are correct; the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates labeling for all other foods. Because these agencies worked together in developing the guidelines, labels on meat and poultry are similar to those of other foods.

Under current regulations, most foods have nutrition labels (compared to about 60 percent of foods before the present guidelines). Some exceptions are raw fruits, raw vegetables, and raw seafood, for which FDA continues to allow point-of-purchase labeling (such as posters or brochures near but not on packages). FSIS now requires labeling for most meat and poultry products, except for raw single-ingredient foods, such as raw chicken breasts, raw beef roasts, and ground beef.

You can identify the required information on labels by the title on the nutrition label panel—"Nutrition Facts."

A list of ingredients is also required on almost all food packages, eliminating past exceptions for foods considered "standard" (such as mayonnaise and bread). Ingredients continue to be listed in descending order by weight.

Here are four key points to know about food labels:

I. You can believe the claims on food packages.

Nutrient Content Claims: While descriptive terms like "low," "good source," and "free" were long used on food labels, their meanings and their usefulness in helping consumers plan a healthy diet were unclear. Now food labels have specific definitions for these terms, assuring shoppers that they can believe what they read on the package:

- free
- light
- more
- good source
- high
- low
- reduced
- less

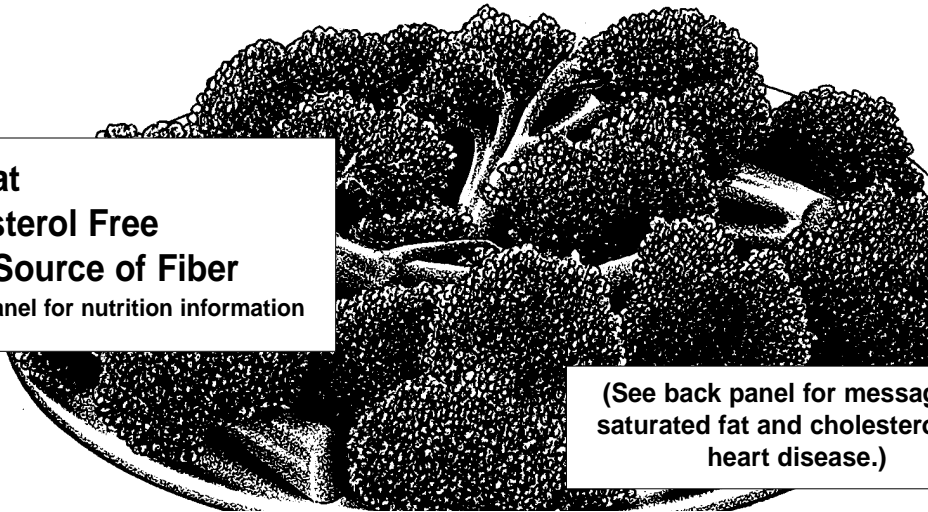
For meat and poultry:

- lean
- extra lean

Look for claims such as "low fat" or "high fiber" on the front panel of the food package. These descriptive claims tell you some of the best nutritional features of the food. Use these as a quick guide to healthy foods. However, you should also look at the nutritional panel on the back or side of the food package. This panel shows what other nutrients are in the food and allows you to compare the food to another food making a similar claim or even to a food making no claim.

Today's Food Label at a Glance

FROZEN BROCCOLI IN SAUCE



- **Low Fat**
 - **Cholesterol Free**
 - **Good Source of Fiber**
- See back panel for nutrition information

(See back panel for message on saturated fat and cholesterol and heart disease.)

NET WT. 8.9 oz. (252g)

Ingredients: Broccoli, soybean oil, milk solids, modified cornstarch, salt, spices.

Health claim message referred to on the front panel is shown here:

"While many factors affect heart disease, diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of this disease."

Adapted from: Food and Drug Administration

Health Claims: Food labels are allowed to carry information about the link between certain nutrients and specific diseases. For such a "health claim" to be made on a package, the FDA must first determine that the diet-disease link is supported by scientific evidence. At this time, FDA is allowing ten specific claims about the relationships between:

- fat and cancer risk
- saturated fat and cholesterol and heart disease risk
- calcium and osteoporosis risk
- sodium and hypertension (high blood

pressure) risk

- fruits, vegetables, and grains that contain soluble fiber and heart disease risk
- soluble fiber from certain foods, such as whole oats and psyllium seed husk and heart disease
- fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables and cancer risk
- fruits and vegetables and cancer risk
- folic acid and neural tube defects
- dietary sugar alcohols and dental caries (cavities)

Today's Food Label at a Glance

Food labels now carry an up-to-date, easy-to-use nutrition information guide which is required on almost all packaged foods (compared to about 60 percent of products until now). The guide serves as a key to help in planning a healthy diet.*

Title indicates the label contains the required information.

Serving sizes are uniform across product lines and reflect the amounts people actually eat.

Nutrients list covers those most important to the health of today's consumers.

Other nutrients

The label tells the number of calories per gram of fat, carbohydrate, and protein.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)
Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

Calories 90 **Calories From Fat** 30

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 3g **5%**

Saturated Fat 0g **0%**

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

Sodium 300 mg **13%**

Total Carbohydrate 13g **4%**

Dietary Fiber 3g **12%**

Sugars 3g

Protein 3g

Vitamin A 80% • Vitamin C 60%

Calcium 4% • 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
Fiber	25g	30g

Calories per gram:

Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Calories from fat are shown on the label to help consumers meet dietary guidelines that recommend people get no more than 30 percent of their calories from fat.

% Daily Value shows how a food fits into the overall daily diet.

Daily Values based on a daily diet of 2,000 and 2,500 calories are listed identically on all labels. Some are maximums (fat, 65 grams *or less*), some are minimums (carbohydrates, 300 grams *or more*). Individuals should adjust the values to fit their own calorie intakes.

**This is only a sample.*

II. You can compare products easily because serving sizes listed are comparable for similar food products.

Since serving sizes are similar across the same kind of products, you can compare one food with another, such as one snack food with another. The required serving sizes are based on amounts of foods that people actually eat, so they are likely to be more realistic.

III. By using the percent (%) Daily Value, you can quickly determine if a product is high or low in a nutrient.

The food label has a % Daily Value column so that you can quickly determine how a food fits into the overall daily diet without knowing anything about the meaning of things such as milligrams of sodium or grams of fat.

The Daily Value is a kind of reference point for a general diet. By noticing if this number is low (example: 5% Daily Value) or high (example: 50% Daily Value), you can make dietary tradeoffs throughout the day by combining foods that have a low Daily Value with those that have a high Daily Value.

IV. By looking at the Daily Values, you can determine how much (or how little) of the major nutrients or food components you should eat on a daily basis.

The Daily Values are located in a footnote at the bottom of the full nutrition label. They show recommended minimum amounts of some nutrients and food components (total carbohydrates and fiber) and recommended maximums for others (fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium).

In the footnote, there are two Daily Value columns, since some nutrient and food component needs differ with the energy level (calorie level) in your diet. The label provides Daily Values for both a 2,000-calorie diet and a 2,500-calorie diet. Individuals should adjust the values to fit their own calorie intakes.



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