

How Do I Understand the “Nutrition Facts” Label?

Most foods in the grocery store have a Nutrition Facts label and ingredient list. When you go shopping, take time to read the Nutrition Facts labels on the foods you purchase. Compare the nutrients and calories in one food to those in another. Make sure you aren’t buying foods high in calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and added sugars!



What information is on the Nutrition Facts label?

The Nutrition Facts label can help you choose healthier foods. It contains the following information:

- **Serving size** — tells you how much of the food is considered a “serving.” A package may contain multiple servings. **Servings per container** will tell you the total number of servings in a package or container. If you eat more or less than the serving size listed, you need to do the math to figure out the amount of nutrients and number of calories you’ve eaten.
- **Calories** — tell you how much energy is in the food. It’s important to pay attention to calories if you’re trying to lose weight or manage your weight.
- **Total fat** — is the amount of fat found in one serving of the food. Total fat includes the amount of “bad fats” (saturated and trans) and “good fats” (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated). Fat is higher in calories than protein or carbohydrates. So, cutting back on your fat intake will help you reduce the number of calories you eat.
- **Saturated fat** — is considered a “bad” fat. Eating too much can raise your LDL (bad) cholesterol level and your risk of heart disease and stroke. Adults who would benefit from lowering LDL cholesterol should limit their saturated fat intake to less than 5% to 6% of their total calories. For a person who needs 2,000 calories a day, this is 120 calories or less, or about 13 grams of saturated fat.
- **Trans fat** — is also considered a “bad fat” because it can raise your LDL cholesterol, decrease your HDL cholesterol, and increase your risk of heart disease. Choose foods with “0” grams of trans fat. Read the ingredient list to avoid foods that contain “partially hydrogenated” oils. Everyone should avoid trans fat.
- **Cholesterol** — is found in foods that come from animals, such as meats, poultry, seafood, eggs and full-fat dairy products. The FDA’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating as little dietary cholesterol as possible within a healthy diet pattern.
- **Sodium** — is in food products as both naturally occurring and added sodium. Salt is sodium chloride. Most adults should aim for less than 1,500 milligrams of sodium each day. That’s a little more than ½ teaspoon of salt.
- **Total carbohydrates** — in food are digested and converted into glucose, or sugar, to provide the body’s cells with energy. Choose carbohydrate-based foods with high amounts of nutrients. These include vegetables, fruits and whole-grain foods.

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- **Dietary fiber** — describes several materials that make up the parts of plants your body can’t digest. As part of a healthy diet, soluble fiber can help decrease your risk of heart disease and some types of cancer. Whole grains and fruits and vegetables include dietary fiber. Most refined (processed) grains contain little fiber.
- **Total sugars** — include both sugars that occur naturally in foods, such as fruit and milk, and sugars that are added to foods and beverages, such as those in desserts, candies and soft drinks.
- **Added sugars** — The FDA’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that less than 10% of your total daily calories come from added sugar. There are many different names for “added sugars,” such as sucrose, fructose, honey, maltose, dextrose, high-fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, sugar and sucrose. Look at the ingredient list and buy foods and beverages that don’t have a lot of added sugars.
- **Protein** — is one of the components in food that provides us with energy. Animal protein contains saturated fat. Choose fish and plant-based protein most often. Limit your intake of red and processed meats. Use low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Try other sources of protein,



such as beans, nuts, seeds, tofu and other soy-based products.

- **Vitamins and minerals** — are important parts of your diet. Eating a variety of foods will help you reach your daily goal of 100% of essential vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium.
- **% Daily Value** — tells you what percentage of each nutrient is in a single serving based on the recommended daily amount. Choose foods with 5% DV or less to consume less of a nutrient. To consume more, choose foods with 20% DV or more.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How many calories should I eat each day?

How many grams of saturated fat should I have each day?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.