

# NEW-LIFESTYLES STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU<sup>SM</sup>

# NUTRITION LABEL FACTS

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Despite growing efforts on the part of the U.S. government to give nutritional information to consumers, up until the 1990's, it was still difficult to find complete, consistent information about the nutrient

content of foods Americans were eating.

This prompted the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and U.S.

Department of

Agriculture (USDA) to call for a major overhaul of food labels with the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act in 1990.

Striving to make healthy eating easier, the new labels were launched in 1994 and included five main changes:

1. Nutrition information printed in larger, more readable type is required for almost all packaged foods. The information appears on the back or side of packaging under the title "Nutrition Facts." The information must also be displayed in grocery stores near fresh foods, like fruits, vegetables and fish.

2. A new column of information, "% Daily Value," shows consumers how the food fits into a healthy diet.

3. Information regarding saturated fat, cholesterol, fiber, sugar, calories from fat and other important information must be included on the label.

4. Serving sizes are revised to better reflect the amount that people eat.

5. Health claims, such as "light" or "low-fat," must meet strict government definitions so that they are accurate and consistent from one food to another.

Despite the FDA and USDA's strides to make nutrition labels both informative and easier-to-read, many of us do not know how to read the labels. Here's a little Nutrition Facts Label 101, so that we can all learn how to take advantage of this information to choose healthy foods.

## Nutrition Facts Label 101

Let's start at the top section of the label. The information in the top or main section contains product-specific information (serving size, number of servings per container, calories and nutrient information). The information on the label is for the serving size listed.

The bottom part of this section contains a footnote with Daily Values (DVs) for 2,000 and 2,500 calorie diets. This footnote provides recommended dietary information for important nutrients, including fats, sodium and fiber. The footnote is found only on larger packages and does not change from product to product.

Sample label for  
Macaroni & Cheese

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b> 250	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	<b>18%</b>
Saturated Fat 3g	<b>15%</b>
Trans Fat 3g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	<b>10%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	<b>20%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	<b>10%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
Sugars 5g	
<b>Protein</b> 5g	
<b>Vitamin A</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Vitamin C</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Calcium</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Iron</b>	<b>4%</b>

\* 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

## 1 The Serving Size

Start by looking at the serving size and the number of servings in the package. Standardized to facilitate comparing similar foods, serving sizes are

measured in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, such as the weight in grams. The serving size dictates the number of calories and all of the other nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. For example, if you eat twice the serving listed on the label,

you would need to double all the numbers in the Nutrition Facts section.

## 2 Calories (and Calories from Fat)

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this particular food. It is important to take note of how many of these calories come from fat. The greater the percentage of calories from fat, the greater the caution you should exercise when making this food choice--as it might not be the best, most nutritious choice.

### The Key Nutrients

#### 3 Limit These Nutrients

The nutrients listed first are ones that can contribute to health problems and may increase the risk of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure. As the American diet tends to promote consumption of these nutrients, it is important to monitor and consume these nutrients in limited, moderate amounts. Following the advice of health professionals, it is especially important to keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol to an absolute minimum to promote and maintain good health. Since the Institute of Medicine published a report on trans fats finding them to be detrimental to heart health, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is requiring that as of January 2006, food companies must list trans fats on nutrition fact labels. Like saturated fats, eating too much trans fat can raise bad LDL cholesterol, lower good HDL cholesterol and increase the risk of heart disease.

#### 4 Maximize These Nutrients

Most Americans don't get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions. For this reason, the usefulness of the nutrient section is twofold: it can be used to red flag nutrients you are trying to avoid or to highlight beneficial nutrients you are trying to increase in your diet.

#### 5 Understanding the Footnote at the Bottom of the Label

The asterisk (\*) following "%

Daily Value" on the Nutrition Facts label alerts the consumer to additional information located as a footnote at the bottom of the label. This footnote, found on all food labels, says, "Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet." If the product carries the full footnote (sometimes not found on small items), it will also list generalized dietary recommendations.

Based upon the advice of public health professionals, recommended Daily Values (DVs) are listed for each nutrient based on both a 2,000 calorie and a 2,500 calorie diet. Most of the DVs increase when looking at a 2,500 calorie diet versus a 2,000 calorie diet; however, the DVs for cholesterol, sodium and potassium remain the same in both diets.

#### How do the Daily Values Relate to the %DVs?

Look at the example below for another way to see how the Daily Values (DVs) relate to the %DVs and dietary guidance. For each nutrient listed there is a DV, a %DV, and dietary advice. If you follow this dietary advice, you will stay within recommended upper or lower limits for the nutrients listed, based on a 2,000 calorie daily diet.

Nutrient	DV	%DV	Dietary Advice
Total Fat	65g	=100%DV	Less than
Sat. Fat	20g	=100%DV	Less than
Cholesterol	300mg	=100%DV	Less than
Sodium	2400mg	=100%DV	Less than
Potassium	3500mg	=100%DV	At least
Total Carbohydrate	300g	=100%DV	At least
Dietary Fiber	25g	=100%DV	At least

Examples of DVs versus %DVs  
Based on a 2,000 Calorie Diet

#### Upper Limit - Eat "Less than"...

For example, the DV for Saturated fat is 20g. This amount is 100% DV for this nutrient. What is the dietary advice? Consume "less than" 20g of saturated fat a day.

#### Lower Limit - Eat "At least"...

The DV for dietary fiber is 25g, which is 100% DV. This means it is recommended that you eat "at least" 25g of dietary fiber a day.

#### The Percent Daily Value (%DV):

The % Daily Value (%DV) is based on Daily Value key nutrient recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet. The %DV helps you determine if a serving of food is high or low in a specific nutrient and if these nutrients contribute a lot, or a little, to your daily recommended allowance. (As a quick guide to %DV, 5%DV or less is low and 20%DV or more is high.)

#### List of Ingredients

Finally, ingredients are listed in descending order by weight, meaning the first ingredient makes up the largest proportion of the food.