

How to Read a Food Label

Take a look at the food label on the side of a food package. The example below outlines the categories you should be checking.

The Nutrition Facts label provides information on serving size, calories, fats, cholesterol, sodium, protein, carbohydrates as well as vitamins A and C and calcium and iron.

Foods can be described by measuring what's in the item. Foods are measured using:

- calories = the amount of energy in food
- g = grams
- mg = milligrams

Start Here - Serving Size

Serving Size is designed to make it easy to compare foods. It is shown in cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount (g). Calories and nutrients on the label are based on serving size.

Calories

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of food. The number of servings you eat determines the number of calories you consume.

As a general rule 40 calories is a low-calorie food, 100 calories is a moderate-calorie food, and 400 or more calories is high-calorie food.

Next Stop - Total Fat

Total Fat represents all types of fat contained in the food. Foods with **3 g or less** per serving are **low-fat foods** and foods with **10 g or more** are considered **high-fat**.

Watch Saturated Fat!

This type of fat can increase your cholesterol. **Aim for 1 g or less per serving or about 16-20 g per day.**

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1/3 cup (100g)	
Servings Per Container about 17	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	140
Calories from Fat	50
% Daily Value**	
Total Fat 0g*	9%
Saturated Fat 0g	8%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	1%
Sodium 20mg	9%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber 2g	6%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 2g	

A Guide to the Big Picture

% Daily Values helps you figure out what percent of the daily recommendation for key nutrients (based on a 2000 calorie diet) a serving of food contains. Use the % Daily Values to help you get an idea of how a food fits into a daily meal plan.

Hidden Fat

If there is **less than 1 g per serving**, then the **amount is listed as 0 g** but the actual amount is reflected in the % Daily Values.

An Alternative Fat Guide

5% or less of total fat is a good indication that the food is low in fat.

Don't Forget Fiber

Dietary Fiber is included in the grams of Total Carbohydrate. A high fiber food has 5 or more grams. **The amount recommended per day is 25 g.**

Trans Fat

This type of fat raises the "bad cholesterol" (LDL) that increases your risk of coronary heart disease. **Health experts recommend that you choose foods with the lowest possible amount of trans fat.**

What Does “Fat-Free” or “Calorie-Free” Mean?

Any “free” food must contain either no amount or a very small amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar, cholesterol, sodium, or calories.

- **Calorie-free** means less than five calories per serving.
- **Fat-free** means less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving.

Fat-free does not mean calorie-free! Many fat-free or low-fat foods have the same number of calories as the higher fat versions, and sometimes even more!

Strategy 2: Use Portion Control

Portion control means eating smaller amounts of foods. The amount of each food you eat determines how many calories you are getting. Many people are unaware of how big a serving is and are eating more calories than they realize. Reading the food label is one way of learning portion sizes. Measuring food is even more helpful.

Measure Food

This is an important and necessary step toward keeping your calories in check. Using this strategy will help you learn the size of a reasonable portion. As with any new skill, it will get easier with time and practice.

So pull out your measuring cups, measuring spoons, and a food scale. Weigh your baked foods, breads, muffins, and fruits, and measure your cereal, soups, condiments (such as ketchup and mustard), and drinks. Once you become familiar with portion sizes, you may be able to estimate without measuring. Many people, however, find that they need to keep measuring certain foods such as ice cream, high-fat spreads, and salad dressings. It’s up to you to decide how well you can estimate the size of your portions.

Do you know?

There are 3,500 calories in one pound of fat.

You need to burn 3,500 calories to lose one pound of body weight.

If you eat 500 fewer calories per day, you’ll lose one pound per week. This rate is considered safe and realistic.

If you know portion sizes and still struggle with eating the right amount of food, read tips on how to control portions on page 91.