



# How Do I Understand the “Nutrition Facts” Label?

Most foods in the grocery store have a nutrition facts label and list of ingredients. When you go grocery shopping, take the time to read the nutrition facts labels on the foods you purchase. Compare nutrients and calories in one food to those in another. The information may surprise you. Make sure you aren't buying foods high in calories, saturated and *trans* fats, sodium and added sugars!



## What information is in the nutrition facts label?

The “Nutrition Facts” label contains this information:

- **Serving Size** — This is how much of the food is considered a “serving”. A package may contain multiple servings. If you eat more or less than the serving size listed, you need to adjust the amount of nutrients and calories you are eating.
- **Calories** — This tells you how much energy is in the food. It is helpful to know if you're cutting calories to lose weight or want to manage your weight.
- **Total Fat** — This is the amount of fat found in one serving of the food. It includes the amount of “bad fats” (saturated and *trans* fats) and “better fats” (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats). Fat is higher in calories than protein or carbohydrates. So, cutting back on your fat intake will help you reduce the amount of calories you eat.
- **Saturated Fat** — Eating too much of these “bad fats” can raise your cholesterol and your risk of heart disease and stroke. Limit your saturated fat intake to less than 5 to 6 percent of your total calories. For a person who needs 2,000 calories a day, this is about 11 to 13 grams of saturated fat.
- **Trans Fat** — These fats are also considered “bad fats” because they can raise LDL cholesterol and your risk of heart disease. Choose foods with “0” grams of *trans* fat and read the ingredients list to avoid foods made with “hydrogenated oils”. Everyone can benefit by limiting *trans* fats.
- **Cholesterol** — The FDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating less than 300 mg of cholesterol a day to maintain normal cholesterol levels. They also recommend consuming less than 200 mg per day if you are at high risk for (or have) heart disease.
- **Sodium** — Watch for both naturally-occurring and added sodium in food products. Salt is sodium chloride. Most people should take in less than 1,500 mg of sodium each day. That's equal to a little more than ½ tsp. of salt.

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- **Total Carbohydrates** — A carbohydrate is a type of sugar. Carbohydrates in food are digested and converted into glucose, or sugar, to provide the cells of the body with energy. Choose carbohydrate-based foods with high amounts of nutrients. These include vegetables, fruits and whole-grain, breads, cereals and pasta.
- **Dietary Fiber** — 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.
- **Sugars** — The amount listed includes both sugars that occur naturally in foods, such as fruit and milk, and sugars that are added to foods, such as soft drinks and other sweetened foods and beverages. There are lots of different names for “added sugars” such as sucrose, fructose, glucose, maltose, dextrose, high-fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, concentrated fruit juice, and honey. Look at the ingredients list and make sure that there aren’t a lot of “added sugars” listed in the ingredients.



- **Protein** — This is one of the components in food that provide us with energy. Animal protein contains saturated fat. Choose fish and skinless poultry and limit your intake of red meat. Use low-fat dairy products. Try other sources of protein such as beans, nuts, seeds, tofu and other soy-based products.
- **Vitamins and Minerals** — Vitamins and minerals are important parts of your diet. Eating a variety of foods will help you reach your daily goal of 100 percent of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron.
- **Daily Value** — The standard daily values are guides for people who eat 2,000 calories each day. If you eat more or less than that, your daily value may be higher or lower.

## 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 to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine 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 the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**How many calories should I eat each day?**

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

## My Questions:

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