

# Nutrition Labels

## Read them for Health!

### *Last in a 3 Part Series*

## At-A-Glance: The Nutrition Facts Label

Understanding what the Nutrition Facts Label includes can help you make **food choices** that are best for your health.

### Your Guide to a Healthy Diet

The Nutrition Facts Label can help you make choices for **overall health**. But some nutrients can also affect certain health conditions and diseases.

Use this as a guide for those nutrients that could impact your own health. Each nutrient section discusses:

- ✓ What the nutrient is
- ✓ What it can mean for your health
- ✓ Label-reading tips

Watch for:

- ✓ "Nutrients to get less of" (the ones that you should try to limit)
- ✓ "Nutrients to get more of" (the ones that are very important to be sure to get enough of)

You also might want to talk to your healthcare provider about which nutrients you should track closely for your continued health.

## Nutrients and your needs

Some are **nutrients to get less of**, others are **nutrients to get more of**. All of them can have an impact on your **long-term health**.

Nutrient	More or Less?
Salt/Sodium	Less
Fat	Less
Cholesterol	Less
Fiber	More
Calcium	More
Vitamins	More

### Dietary Salt/Sodium: Get less of

#### **What It Is:**

Salt is a crystal-like compound that is used to flavor and preserve food. The words **"salt" and "sodium" are the same thing**. Salt is listed as "sodium" on the Nutrition Facts Label.

#### **What You Should Know:**

A small amount of sodium is needed to help certain organs and fluids work properly. But most people eat too much of it - and they may not even know it! That's because many packaged foods have a high amount of sodium, even when they don't taste "salty." When you add salt to food, you're adding **more** sodium.

***Sodium has been linked to high blood pressure.*** In fact, eating less sodium can often help **lower blood pressure**, which in turn can help **reduce the risk of heart disease**.

Blood pressure normally rises with age. Choose to limit your sodium intake now.

## Fiber: Get more of

### **What It Is:**

Fiber, or "dietary fiber," is sometimes called "roughage." It's the part of food that can't be broken down during digestion. Because it moves through your digestive system "undigested," it plays an important role in keeping your system moving and "in working order."

### **What You Should Know:**

Fiber is a "nutrient to get more of." In addition to aiding in digestion, fiber has a number of other health-related benefits. ***These benefits are especially effective when you have a high fiber diet that is also low in saturated fat, cholesterol, trans fat, added sugars, salt, and alcohol.***

Eating a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain some types of dietary fiber, particularly soluble fiber, may help lower your cholesterol and reduce your chances of getting **heart disease**, a disease associated with many factors.

Healthful diets that are low in fat *and* rich in fruits and vegetables that contain fiber may reduce the risk of **some types of cancer**, including colon cancer, a disease associated with many factors. In addition, such healthful diets are also associated with a reduced risk of **type 2 diabetes**.

Fiber also aids in the regularity of bowel movements and preventing constipation. It may help reduce the risk of **diverticulosis**, a common condition in which small pouches form in the colon wall. This condition often has few or no symptoms; people who already have diverticulosis and do have symptoms often find that increased fiber consumption can reduce these symptoms. It's also important to note that if the pouches caused by diverticulosis rupture and become infected, it results in a more severe condition called **diverticulitis**.

### **Soluble v. Insoluble Fiber: Where To Get It, and What It Does**

Fiber comes in two forms:

1. Insoluble
2. Soluble

Most plant foods contain some of each kind.

**Insoluble fiber** is mostly found in whole-grain products, such as wheat bran cereal, vegetables and fruit. It provides "bulk" for stool formation and helps wastes move quickly through your colon.

**Soluble fiber** is found in peas, beans, many vegetables and fruits, oat bran, whole grains, barley, cereals, seeds, rice, some pastas, and some crackers. It slows the digestion of carbohydrates, and can help stabilize blood sugar if you have diabetes. In addition, it helps lower "bad cholesterol." This, in turn, reduces the risk of heart disease.

## Total Fat: Get less of

### **What It Is:**

Fat, or "dietary fat," is a nutrient that is a major source of energy for the body. It also helps you absorb certain important vitamins. As a food ingredient, fat provides taste, consistency, and helps you feel full.

### **What You Should Know:**

Eating too much fat can lead to a wide range of health challenges. The total amount and type of fat can contribute to and/or increase the risk of:

- Heart disease
- High cholesterol
- Increased risk of many cancers (including colon-rectum cancer)
- Obesity
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes

There are ***different types of dietary fat***. Some have health benefits when eaten in small quantities, but others do not.

**"Good" Fat:** unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated)

These are healthful if eaten in moderation. In fact, small amounts can even help **lower cholesterol levels!**

**Best Sources:** plant-based oils (sunflower, corn, soybean, cottonseed, avocado and safflower), olive, canola and peanut oils, nuts, and avocados.

**"Undesirable" Fat:** saturated and trans fats. These can raise cholesterol levels in the blood - which in turn can contribute to heart disease.

**Common Sources:** meat, poultry, fish, butter, ice cream, cheese, coconut and palm kernel oils, solid shortenings, and hard margarines.

Meat (including chicken and turkey) and fish supply protein, B vitamins, and iron. When selecting and preparing meat, poultry, fish and milk or milk products, choose those that are lean, low-fat, or fat-free. Doing this, along with removing the skin from fish and poultry, are good strategies for limiting "undesirable" fat from your diet. In addition, dry beans, which can be used as a meat substitute, are a good source of protein and are non-fat.

### ***Understanding Trans Fat***

*Trans* fat is one of the newest additions to the Nutrition Facts Label, so you may be hearing more about it. Here's what you need to know:

Most *trans* fat is made when manufacturers "hydrogenize" liquid oils, turning them into solid fats, like shortening or some margarines. *Trans* fat is commonly found in crackers, cookies, snack foods, and other foods made with or fried in these solid oils.

***Trans* fat, like saturated fat and cholesterol, raises your LDL (bad) cholesterol and can increase your risk of coronary heart disease.**

### ***Trans Fat On the Label***

There is no recommended total daily value for *trans* fat, so you won't find the %DV of *trans* fat on a food's Nutrition Facts Label. However, you can still use the label to see if a food contains *trans* fat and to compare two foods by checking to see if **grams** of *trans* fat are listed. If there is anything other than 0 grams listed, then the food contains *trans* fat. Because it is extremely difficult to eat a diet that is completely *trans* fat-free without decreasing other nutrient intakes, just **aim to keep your intake of *trans* fat as low as possible.**

### **Label Reading Tips: Total Fat**

When comparing foods, check the Nutrition Facts Label and choose the food with the lower %DV of total fat and saturated fat, and low or no grams of *trans* fat.

- ✓ **5% DV or less of total fat is best**
- ✓ **20% DV or more of total fat is high**

When choosing foods that are labeled "fat-free" and "low-fat," be aware that **fat-free doesn't mean calorie-free**. Sometimes, to make a food tastier, extra sugars are added, which adds extra calories. Be sure to check the calories per serving.

## Cholesterol: Get less of

### What It Is:

Cholesterol is a crystal-like substance carried through the bloodstream by lipoproteins - the "transporters" of fat. Cholesterol is required for certain important body functions, like digesting dietary fats, making hormones, and building cell walls.

**Cholesterol is found in animal-based foods, like meats and dairy products.**

### What You Should Know:

Too much cholesterol in the bloodstream can damage arteries, especially the ones that supply blood to the heart. It can build up in blood vessel linings. This is called **atherosclerosis**, and it can lead to heart attacks and stroke.

However, it's important to know that not all cholesterol is bad. There are **two kinds of cholesterol** found in the bloodstream:

**High-density lipoprotein (HDL):** This "**good**" cholesterol is the form in which cholesterol travels *back to the liver*, where it can be eliminated.

HDL helps prevent cholesterol buildup in blood vessels. A higher level of this cholesterol is better. **Low HDL levels increase heart disease risk.**

**Low-density lipoprotein (LDL):** This "**bad**" cholesterol is *carried into the blood*. It is the main cause of harmful fatty buildup in arteries.

**The higher the LDL cholesterol level in the blood, the greater the heart disease risk. So, a lower level of this cholesterol is better.**

## Label Reading Tips: Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a "nutrient to get less of." When comparing foods, look at the Nutrition Facts Label, and choose the food with the lower %DV of cholesterol. **Be sure not to go above 100% DV for the day.**

- ✓ **5% DV or less of cholesterol is low**
- ✓ **20% DV or more of cholesterol is high**

One of the primary ways LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels can become too high in the blood is by eating too much saturated fat and cholesterol.

**Saturated fat raises LDL levels more than anything else in the diet.**

## Calcium: Get more of

### What It Is:

Calcium is a mineral that has a lot of uses in the body, but it is **best known for its role in building healthy bones and teeth.**

### What You Should Know:

Lack of calcium causes **osteoporosis**, which is the primary cause of hip fractures. In fact, the word "osteoporosis" means "porous bones." It causes progressive bone loss as you age, and makes bones fragile - so that they can break easily. It's extremely important (especially for women) to get enough calcium throughout your life, especially after menopause. Women are at much higher risk for osteoporosis, but men can get it too.

### A Note About Vitamin D

For calcium to be properly absorbed by the body, you also need to get enough vitamin D.

Many milk products and cereals are fortified with vitamin D. Vitamin D is produced by the body when exposed to sunlight.

It's true that many dairy products, which contain high levels of calcium, are relatively high in fat and calories. But keep in mind that **fat-free or low-fat types of milk products** are excellent calcium sources.

**Nutritionists recommend that you try to get most of your calcium from calcium-rich foods, rather than from calcium supplements.**

The Nutrition Facts Label can help you make good high-calcium choices.

**Good sources of calcium are:**

- ✓ Canned salmon (with bones, which are edible)
- ✓ Calcium-fortified soy beverages
- ✓ Tofu (soybean curd that is "calcium-processed")
- ✓ Certain vegetables (for example, dark leafy greens such as collards and turnip greens)
- ✓ Legumes
- ✓ Calcium-fortified grain products
- ✓ Calcium-fortified juice

**Label Reading: Tips Calcium**

Read the label to see how much calcium is in the food you are choosing.

- **5% DV or less is low in calcium**
- **20% DV or more is high in calcium**

Select foods that are high in calcium as often as possible.

## Glossary of Key Nutrition Label Terms

**Calcium:** a mineral that builds and maintains strong bones. Calcium helps prevent osteoporosis.

**Calories:** the energy provided by food/nutrients. On the label, calories shown are for one serving.

**Calories from Fat:** Fat calories shown on the label are for one serving.

**Cholesterol:** a necessary nutrient from animal-based foods that is carried in the bloodstream. LDL cholesterol is "bad" and HDL cholesterol is "good."

**Daily Value:** the amount of certain nutrients that most people need each day.

**Nutrient:** an ingredient in a food that provides nourishment or nutritional benefit.

**Nutrition Facts Label:** the black-and-white box found on food and beverage packages.

**Percent Daily Value (%DV):** the percentage of a nutrient found in one serving of food, based on the established standard of 2000 calories per day.

**Saturated Fat:** a type of fat that is solid at room temperature. It is usually animal-based. This type of fat is associated with certain health risks.

**Sodium:** dietary salt that is important in the diet. However, too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure and risk of heart disease.

**Total Fat:** the combined fats that provide energy to the body. Some types of fat are healthier than others.

**Trans Fat:** a type of fat that is created when liquid fat is turned into solid fat during manufacturing. Trans fat has no daily value, and should be replaced with unsaturated fat in your diet whenever possible.

**Unsaturated Fat:** a type of fat that is liquid at room temperature; can be plant-based or animal-based. These are usually "good fats."

Remember - the **Nutrition Facts Label** is a tool that is available to you on every packaged food and beverage!

Source: FDA