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People look at food labels for different reasons. But whatever the reason, many consumers would like to know how to use this information more effectively and easily. The following label-building skills are intended to make it easier for you to use nutrition labels to make quick, informed food choices that contribute to a healthy diet. The Nutrition Facts Label An Overview: The information in the main or top section (see #1-4 and #6 on the sample nutrition label below), can vary with each food product; it contains product-specific information (serving size, calories, and nutrient information). The bottom part (see #5 on the sample label below) 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. In the following Nutrition Facts label we have colored certain sections to help you focus on those areas that will be explained in detail. You will not see these colors on the food labels on products you purchase. 1. The Serving Size The first place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts label is the serving size and the number of servings in the package. Serving sizes are standardized to make it easier to compare similar foods; they are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., the number of grams. The size of the serving on the food package influences the number of calories and all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. Pay attention to the serving size, especially how many servings there are in the food package. Then ask yourself, How many servings am I consuming? (e.g., 1/2 serving, 1 serving, or more) In the sample label, one serving equals one cup. If you ate the whole package, you would eat two cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers, including the %Daily Values as shown in the sample label. 2. Calories Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. Many Americans consume more calories than they need without meeting recommended intakes for a number of nutrients. The calorie section of the label can help you manage your weight (i.e., gain, lose, or maintain.) Remember: the number of servings you consume determines the number of calories you actually eat (your portion amount). In the example, there are 250 calories in one serving of this macaroni and cheese. How many calories from fat are there in ONE serving? Answer: 110 calories, which means almost half the calories in a single serving come from fat. What if you ate the whole package content? Then, you would consume two servings, or 500 calories, and 220 would come from fat. General Guide to Calories 40 Calories is low 100 Calories is moderate 400 Calories or more is high The General Guide to Calories provides a general reference for calories when you look at a Nutrition Facts label. This guide is based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Eating too many calories per day is linked to overweight and obesity. 3 & 4 The Nutrients: How Much? Look at the top of the nutrient section in the sample label. It shows you some key nutrients that impact on your health and separates them into two main groups: Limit These Nutrients The nutrients listed first are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much. They are identified in yellow as Limit these Nutrients. Eating too much fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, or sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, like heart disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. Important: Health experts recommend that you keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet. Get Enough of These Most Americans dont get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. They are identified in blue as Get Enough of these Nutrients. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions. For example, getting enough calcium may reduce the risk of osteoporosis, a condition that results in brittle bones as one ages. Eating a diet high in dietary fiber promotes healthy bowel function. Additionally, a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain dietary fiber, particularly soluble fiber, and low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. Remember: You can use the Nutrition Facts label not only to help limit those nutrients you want to cut back on but also to increase those nutrients you need to consume in greater amounts. 5. Understanding the Footnote on the Bottom of the Nutrition Facts Label Note the * used after the heading %Daily Value on the Nutrition Facts label. It refers to the Footnote in the lower part of the nutrition label, which tells you %DVs are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. This statement must be on all food labels. But the remaining information in the full footnote may not be on the package if the size of the label is too small. When the full footnote does appear, it will always be the same. It doesnt change from product to product, because it shows recommended dietary advice for all Americansit is not about a specific food product.Look at the amounts circled in red in the footnotethese are the Daily Values (DV) for each nutrient listed and are based on public health experts advice. DVs are recommended levels of intakes. DVs in the footnote are based on a 2,000 or 2,500 calorie diet. Note how the DVs for some nutrients change, while others (for cholesterol and sodium) remain the same for both calorie amounts. How 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 or a goal. If you follow this dietary advice, you will stay within public health experts recommended upper or lower limits for the nutrients listed, based on a 2,000 calorie daily diet. NutrientDV%DVGoal 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 Total Carbohydrate 300g = 100%DV At least Dietary Fiber 25g = 100%DV At least Upper Limit Eat Less than The nutrients that have upper daily limits are listed first on the footnote of larger labels and on the example above. Upper limits means it is recommended that you stay below eat less than the Daily Value nutrient amounts listed per day. For example, the DV for Saturated fat (in the yellow section) is 20g. This amount is 100% DV for this nutrient. What is the goal or dietary advice? To eat less than 20 g or 100%DV for the day.< Lower Limit Eat At least Now look at the section in blue where dietary fiber is listed. The DV for dietary fiber is 25g, which is 100% DV. This means it is recommended that you eat at least this amount of dietary fiber per day. The DV for Total Carbohydrate (section in white) is 300g or 100%DV. This amount is recommended for a balanced daily diet that is based on 2,000 calories, but can vary, depending on your daily intake of fat and protein. Now lets look at the %DVs. 6. The Percent Daily Value (%DV): The % Daily Values (%DVs) are based on the Daily Value recommendations for key nutrients but only for a 2,000 calorie daily dietnot 2,500 calories. You, like most people, may not know how many calories you consume in a day. But you can still use the %DV as a frame of reference whether or not you consume more or less than 2,000 calories. The %DV helps you determine if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient. Note: a few nutrients, like trans fat, do not have a %DVthey will be discussed later. Do you need to know how to calculate percentages to use the %DV? No, the label (the %DV) does the math for you. It helps you interpret the numbers (grams and milligrams) by putting them all on the same scale for the day (0-100%DV). The %DV column doesnt add up vertically to 100%. Instead each nutrient is based on 100% of the daily requirements for that nutrient (for a 2,000 calorie diet). This way you can tell high from low and know which nutrients contribute a lot, or a little, to your daily recommended allowance (upper or lower). Quick Guide to %DV: 5%DV or less is low and 20%DV or more is high: This guide tells you that 5%DV or less is low for all nutrients, those you want to limit (e.g., fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium), or for those that you want to consume in greater amounts (fiber, calcium, etc). As the Quick Guide shows, 20%DV or more is high for all nutrients. Example: Look at the amount of Total Fat in one serving listed on the sample nutrition label. Is 18%DV contributing a lot or a little to your fat limit of 100% DV? Check the Quick Guide to %DV. 18%DV, which is below 20%DV, is not yet high, but what if you ate the whole package (two servings)? You would double that amount, eating 36% of your daily allowance for Total Fat. Coming from just one food, that amount leaves you with 64% of your fat allowance (100%-36%=64%) for all of the other foods you eat that day, snacks and drinks included. Using the %DV for: Comparisons: The %DV also makes it easy for you to make comparisons. You can compare one product or brand to a similar product. Just make sure the serving sizes are similar, especially the weight (e.g. gram, milligram, ounces) of each product. Its easy to see which foods are higher or lower in nutrients because the serving sizes are generally consistent for similar types of foods, (see the comparison example at the end) except in a few cases like cereals. Nutrient Content Claims: Use the %DV to help you quickly distinguish one claim from another, such as reduced fat vs. light or nonfat. Just compare the %DVs for Total Fat in each food product to see which one is higher or lower in that nutrientthere is no need to memorize definitions. This works when comparing all nutrient content claims, e.g., less, light, low, free, more, high, etc. Dietary Trade-Offs: You can use the %DV to help you make dietary trade-offs with other foods throughout the day. You dont have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. When a food you like is high in fat, balance it with foods that are low in fat at other times of the day. Also, pay attention to how much you eat so that the total amount of fat for the day stays below 100%DV. Nutrients With a %DV but No Weight Listed Spotlight on Calcium: Calcium: Look at the %DV for calcium on food packages so you know how much one serving contributes to the total amount you need per day. Remember, a food with 20%DV or more contributes a lot of calcium to your daily total, while one with 5%DV or less contributes a little. Experts advise adult consumers to consume adequate amounts of calcium, that is, 1,000mg or 100%DV in a daily 2,000 calorie diet. This advice is often given in milligrams (mg), but the Nutrition Facts label only lists a %DV for calcium. For certain populations, they advise that adolescents, especially girls, consume 1,300mg (130%DV) and post-menopausal women consume 1,200mg (120%DV) of calcium daily. The DV for calcium on food labels is 1,000mg. Dont be fooled always check the label for calcium because you cant make assumptions about the amount of calcium in specific food categories. Example: the amount of calcium in milk, whether skim or whole, is generally the same per serving, whereas the amount of calcium in the same size yogurt container (8oz) can vary from 20-45 %DV. Nutrients Without a %DV: Trans Fats, Protein, and Sugars: Note that Trans fat, Sugars and, Protein do not list a %DV on the Nutrition Facts label. Trans Fat: Experts could not provide a reference value for trans fat nor any other information that FDA believes is sufficient to establish a Daily Value or %DV. Scientific reports link trans fat (and saturated fat) with raising blood LDL (bad) cholesterol levels, both of which increase your risk of coronary heart disease, a leading cause of death in the US. Important: Health experts recommend that you keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet. Protein: A %DV is required to be listed if a claim is made for protein, such as high in protein. Otherwise, unless the food is meant for use by infants and children under 4 years old, none is needed. Current scientific evidence indicates that protein intake is not a public health concern for adults and children over 4 years of age. Sugars: No daily reference value has been established for sugars because no recommendations have been made for the total amount to eat in a day. Keep in mind, the sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts label include naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as those added to a food or drink. Check the ingredient list for specifics on added sugars. If you are concerned about your intake of sugars, make sure that added sugars are not listed as one of the first few ingredients. Other names for added sugars include: corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, dextrose, sucrose, honey, and maple syrup. To limit nutrients that have no %DV, like trans fat and sugars, compare the labels of similar products and choose the food with the lowest amount. In this section: Nutrition Education Resources & Materials Espaol (Spanish)In 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) updated requirements for the Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods and drinks. FDA required changes to the Nutrition Facts label based on updated scientific information, new nutrition research, and input from the public. This was the first major update to the label in over 20 years. The refreshed design and updated information make it easier for you to make informed food choices that contribute to lifelong healthy eating habits.Learn about Whats on the Nutrition Facts Label, including details on calories, serving sizes, added sugars, and more.Education Campaign The New Nutrition Facts Label: Whats in it for You? education campaign was developed by FDA to raise awareness about the changes to the Nutrition Facts label, increase its use, and help consumers, health care professionals, and educators learn how to use it as a tool for maintaining healthy dietary practices.The education campaign includes outreach through many channels including social media, indoor/outdoor advertising, videos, and consumer-friendly downloadable educational materials.In 2018, FDA announced the Nutrition Innovation Strategy, which sets a strategic course for taking action to reduce preventable death and disease related to poor nutrition. As part of the agencys strategy, this new campaign supports consumer education as a key element of FDAs ongoing public health efforts. PDF (344KB) Interactive LabelGet more details on everything thats listed on the Nutrition Facts label. Visit the Interactive Nutrition Facts Label to explore the label, from top to bottom.This tool provides a detailed look at all the information listed on the Nutrition Facts label, helpful tips for a healthy diet, and downloadable fact sheets to keep and share.Important Information for Specific Groups Get Email Updates Enter your E-mail address to receive the quarterly HFP News for Educators newsletter on food safety, nutrition, and cosmetic safety. Back to Top Espaol (Spanish)People look at food labels for a variety of reasons. But whatever the reason, many consumers would like to know how to use this information more effectively and easily. The following label-reading skills are intended to make it easier for you to use the Nutrition Facts labels to make quick, informed food decisions to help you choose a healthy diet.Overview | Serving Information | Calories | Nutrients | The Percent Daily Value (%DV) | Nutrition Facts Label VariationsFor additional resources on the Nutrition Facts label, visit www.fda.gov/NutritionFactsLabel.OverviewThe information in the main or top section (see #1-4) of the sample nutrition label (below) can vary with each food and beverage product; it contains product-specific information (serving size, calories, and nutrient information). The bottom section contains a footnote that explains the % Daily Value and gives the number of calories used for general nutrition advice.In the Nutrition Facts label below we have colored certain sections to help you focus on those areas that will be explained in detail. Note that these colored sections are not on the actual food labels of products you purchase.Sample Label for Frozen Lasagna 1. Serving Information(#1 on sample label) When looking at the Nutrition Facts label, first take a look at the number of servings in the package (servings per container) and the serving size. Serving sizes are standardized to make it easier to compare similar foods; they are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., the number of grams (g). The serving size reflects the amount that people typically eat or drink. It is not a recommendation of how much you should eat or drink.Its important to realize that all the nutrient amounts shown on the label, including the number of calories, refer to the size of the serving. Pay attention to the serving size, especially how many servings there are in the food package. For example, you might ask yourself if you are consuming serving, 1 serving, or more. In the sample label, one serving of lasagna equals 1 cup. If you ate two cups, you would be consuming two servings. That is two times the calories and nutrients shown in the sample label, so you would need to double the nutrient and calorie amounts, as well as the %DVs, to see what you are getting in two servings.ExampleOne Serving of Lasagna%DVTwo Serving of Lasagna%DVServing Size1 cup2 cupsCalories280560Total Fat9g12%18g24%Saturated Fat4.5g23%9g46%Trans Fat0g0gCholesterol35mg12%70mg24%Sodium850mg37%1700mg74%Total Carbohydrate34g12%68g24%Dietary Fiber4g14%8g29%Total Sugars6g12gAdded Sugars0g0%0g0%Protein15g30gVitamin D0mcg0%0mcg0%Calcium320mg25%640mg50%Iron1.6mg8%3.2mg20%Potassium510mg10%1020mg20%2. Calories(#2 on sample label) Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. In the example, there are 280 calories in one serving of lasagna. What if you ate the entire package? Then, you would consume 4 servings, or 1,120 calories.To achieve or maintain a healthy body weight, balance the number of calories you eat and drink with the number of calories your body uses. 2,000 calories a day is used as a general guide for nutrition advice. Your calorie needs may be higher or lower and vary depending on your age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level. Learn your estimated calorie needs at The number of servings you consume determines the number of calories you actually eat. Eating too many calories per day is linked to overweight and obesity.3. Nutrients(#3 on sample label) Look at section 3 in the sample label. It shows you some key nutrients that impact your health. You can use the label to support your personal dietary needs look for foods that contain more of the nutrients you want to get more of and less of the nutrients you may want to limit.Nutrients to get less of: Saturated Fat, Sodium, and Added Sugars.Saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars are nutrients listed on the label that may be associated with adverse health effects and Americans generally consume too much of them. They are identified as nutrients to get less of. Eating too much saturated fat and sodium, for example, is associated with an increased risk of developing some health conditions, like cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure. Consuming too much added sugars can make it hard to meet important nutrient needs while staying within calorie limits.What are Added Sugars and How are they Different from Total Sugars?Total Sugars on the Nutrition Facts label includes sugars naturally present in many nutritious foods and beverages, such as sugar in milk and fruit as well as any added sugars that may be present in the product. No Daily Reference Value has been established for total sugars because no recommendation has been made for the total amount to eat in a day.Added Sugars on the Nutrition Facts label include sugars that are added during the processing of foods (such as sucrose or dextrose), foods packaged as sweeteners (such as table sugar), sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices. Diets high in calories from added sugars can make it difficult to meet daily recommended levels of important nutrients while staying within calorie limits.Note: Having the word includes before Added Sugars on the label indicates that Added Sugars are included in the number of grams of Total Sugars in the product.For example, a container of yogurt with added sweeteners, might list: This means that the product has 7 grams of Added Sugars and 8 grams of naturally occurring sugars for a total of 15 grams of sugar.Nutrients to get more of: Dietary Fiber, Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium.Dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium are nutrients on the label that Americans generally do not get the recommended amount of. They are identified as nutrients to get more of. Eating a diet high in dietary fiber can increase the frequency of bowel movements, lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels, and reduce calorie intake. Diets higher in vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium can reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis, anemia, and high blood pressure.Remember: You can use the label to support your personal dietary needschoose foods that contain more of the nutrients you want to get more of and less of the nutrients you may want to limit.4. The Percent Daily Value (%DV)(#4 on sample label) The % Daily Value (%DV) is the percentage of the Daily Value for each nutrient in a serving of the food. The Daily Values are reference amounts (expressed in grams, milligrams, or micrograms) of nutrients to consume or not to exceed each day.The %DV shows how much a nutrient in a serving of a food contributes to a total daily diet.The %DV helps you determine if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient.Do you need to know how to calculate percentages to use the %DV? No, because the label (the %DV) does the math for you! It helps you interpret the nutrient numbers (grams, milligrams, or micrograms) by putting them all on the same scale for the day (0-100%DV). The %DV column doesn't add up vertically to 100%. Instead, the %DV is the percentage of the Daily Value for each nutrient in a serving of the food. It can tell you if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient and whether a serving of the food contributes a lot, or a little, to your daily diet for each nutrient.Note: some nutrients on the Nutrition Facts label, like total sugars and trans fat, do not have a %DV they will be discussed later.General Guide to %DV5% DV or less of a nutrient per serving is considered low20% DV or more of a nutrient per serving is considered highMore often, choose foods that are:Higher in %DV for Dietary Fiber, Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and PotassiumLower in %DV for Saturated Fat, Sodium, and Added SugarsExample: Look at the amount of sodium in one serving listed on the sample nutrition label. Is %DV of 37% contributing a lot or a little to your diet? Check the General Guide to %DV. This product contains 37% DV for sodium, which shows that this is a HIGH sodium product (it has more than 20% DV for sodium). If you consumed 2 servings, that would provide 74% of the DV for sodium nearly three-quarters of an entire days worth of sodium. Compare Foods: Use %DV to compare food products (remember to make sure the serving size is the same) and more often choose products that are higher in nutrients you want to get more of and lower in nutrients you want to get less of.Understand Nutrient Content Claims: Use %DV to help distinguish one claim from another, such as "light, low, and reduced. Simply compare %DVs in each food product to see which one is higher or lower in a particular nutrient. There is no need to memorize definitions.Dietary Trade-Offs: You can use the %DV to help you make dietary trade-offs with other foods throughout the day. You don't have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. When a food you like is high in saturated fat, balance it with foods that are low in saturated fat at other times of the day. Also, pay attention to how much you eat during the entire day, so that the total amount of saturated fat, as well as other nutrients you want to limit, stays below 100%DV.How the Daily Values Relate to the %DVsLook 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 in the table, there is a DV, a %DV, and dietary advice or a goal. If you follow this dietary advice, you will stay within public health experts' recommended upper or lower limits for the nutrients listed, based on a 2,000-calorie daily diet.Examples of DVs versus %DVsBased on a 2,000 Calorie DietNutrientDV%DVGoalSaturated Fat20g=100% DVLess thanSodium2,300mg=100% DVLess thanDietary Fiber28g=100% DVAt leastAdded Sugars50g=100% DVLess thanVitamin D20mcg=100% DVAt leastCalcium1,300mg=100% DVAt leastIron18mg=100% DVAt leastPotassium4,700mg=100% DVAt leastUpper Limit - Eat "Less than"...Upper limit means it is recommended that you stay below or eat "less than" the Daily Value nutrient amounts listed per day. For example, the DV for saturated fat is 20g. This amount is 100% DV for this nutrient. What is the goal or dietary advice? To eat "less than" 20 g or 100%DV each day.Lower Limit - Eat "At least"...The DV for dietary fiber is 28g, which is 100% DV. This means it is recommended that you eat "at least" this amount of dietary fiber on most days.Nutrients Without a %DV: Trans Fats, Protein, and Total Sugars:Note that Trans fat and Total Sugars do not list a %DV on the Nutrition Facts label. Protein only lists a %DV in specific situations listed below.Trans Fat: Experts could not provide a reference value for trans fat nor any other information that FDA believes is sufficient to establish a Daily Value.According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, there is evidence that diets higher in trans fat are associated with increased blood levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL or bad) cholesterolwhich, in turn, are associated with an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Note: most uses of artificial trans fat in the U.S. food supply have been phased out as of 2018.Protein: A %DV is required to be listed if a claim is made for protein, such as "high in protein." The %DV for protein must also be listed on the label if the product is intended for infants and children under 4 years of age. However, if the product is intended for the general population 4 years of age and older and a claim is not made about protein on the label, the %DV for protein is not required.Current scientific evidence indicates that protein intake is not a public health concern for adults and children over 4 years of age in the United States.Total Sugars: No Daily Reference Value has been established for Total Sugars because no recommendations have been made for the total amount to eat in a day. Keep in mind that the Total Sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts label include naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as Added Sugars.Nutrition Facts Label VariationsMany Nutrition Facts labels on the market will be formatted in the same way as the lasagna label that has been used as an example throughout this page, but there are other formats of the label that food manufacturers are permitted to use. This final section will present two alternate formats: the dual-column label and the single-ingredient sugar label.In addition to dual-column labeling and single-ingredient sugar labels, there are other label formats which you can explore here.Dual-Column LabelsFor certain products that are larger than a single serving but that could be consumed in one sitting or multiple sittings, manufacturers will have to provide dual column labels to indicate the amounts of calories and nutrients on both a per serving and per package or per unit basis. The purpose of this type of dual-column labeling is to allow people to easily identify how many calories and nutrients they are getting if they eat or drink the entire package/unit at one time. For example, a bag of pretzels with 3 servings per container might have a label that looks like this to show you how many calories and other nutrients would be in one serving and in one package (3 servings).Pretzels Single-Ingredient Sugar labelsPackages and containers of products such as pure honey, pure maple syrup, or packages of pure sugar are not required to include a declaration of the number of grams of Added Sugars in a serving of the product but must still include a declaration of the percent Daily Value for Added Sugars. Manufacturers are encouraged, but not required, to use the symbol immediately following the Added Sugars percent Daily Value on single-ingredient sugars, which would lead to a footnote explaining the amount of added sugars that one serving of the product contributes to the diet as well as the contribution of a serving of the product toward the percent Daily Value for Added Sugars. Single-ingredient sugars and syrups are labeled in this way so that it does not look like more sugars have been added to the product and to ensure that consumers have information about how a serving of these products contributes to the Daily Value for added sugars and to their total diet.Here is an example of how a label on a single-ingredient sugar, such as honey, could look.Honey The Nutrition Facts Label on packaged foods is based on dietary recommendations for Americans.Read the label on your packaged food and drinks to track sugars, fats, protein, and other nutrients.Using the label can help you choose foods for a healthy diet. The Nutrition Facts Label on packaged foods is based on dietary recommendations for Americans. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates what goes on the Nutrition Facts Label. Below are explanations of parts of the label and some tips for using it to follow healthy eating patterns. This label is required on all packaged foods made in the United States and imported from other countries. The serving size reflects what people are likely to eat or drink. This is not necessarily the portion you should eat. For example, one serving size of ice cream is labeled as cup. A 12ounce or 20ounce bottle of soda is labeled as one serving. Be sure you know how many servings are in packaged food. For example, if you buy what looks like an individual sized chicken pie, check the Nutrition Facts Label. It might actually be two servings. with double the calories and sodium of a single serving. Dual Column LabelsSome food and drink packages that contain more than one serving may have a dual column Nutrition Facts Label. In that case, one column on the Nutrition Facts Label may provide calorie and nutrition information for one serving. Another column may provide calorie and nutrition information for the whole package. Larger, darker letters make calories the easiest item to see. When it comes to health outcomes, the type of fat you eat matters more than the overall amount of fat. The Nutrition Facts Label shows total fat in grams and percentages of calories from fat. The Nutrition Facts Label has separate lines for saturated and trans fats, which are less healthy than other types of fat. Look for foods with very little saturated and trans fats. The recommended daily limit for sodium is 2,300 milligrams. The Nutrition Facts Label indicates the number of milligrams of sodium in a serving. Most sodium we consume is from salt, which is a common ingredient in processed foods. Read the Nutrition Facts Labels and choose the product with less sodium. Keep Reading: Tips for Reducing Sodium Intake The Nutrition Facts Label shows the percentage of calories from added sugars. Naturally occurring sugars, such as those in fruit or milk, are not added sugars. Added sugars include brown sugar, maple sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, honey, malt syrup, and molasses. The two main sources of added sugars in the United States are sugary drinks and desserts/sweet snacks. Keep your intake of added sugars to less than 10% of your total daily calories. That means if you consume 2,000 calories in a day, added sugars should account for no more than 200 calories. If you eat even one large dessert or sugary drink per day, you are likely getting more than the recommended daily limit of added sugar. Try drinking plain water instead of sugary drinks and limiting the serving size of treats. See how to Rethink Your Drink and Be Sugar Smart. The amount of these nutrients are required to be on the Nutrition Facts Label: Vitamin DCalciumIronPotassiumFood producers can voluntarily include vitamins A and C. Keep Reading: Micronutrient Facts Share copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. The information on food labels is intended to help consumers become savvy about their food choices. The front, back, and sides of a package are filled with information to inform us what the food contains and to provide guidance in making healthier selections of processed foods. However, all the numbers, percentages, and sometimes complex-sounding ingredients can lead to more confusion than clarity. This guide will help you to navigate the terminology and nutrition information on a food package to ensure that you know what youre buying. The Nutrition Facts label is overseen by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and was first mandated under the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 to help consumers make quick, informed food choices. It has undergone revisions, with the latest update released in 2016. Changes are generally based on updated scientific information and input from the public regarding ease of use. Serving Size and Calories are bolded and in larger font. Calories is an important number to many consumers. The label lists the calorie amount for one serving of food. The serving size, also important but often unnoticed, is easily doubled or tripled when not paying attention to the serving size, quickly inflating the calories. Highlighting both of these values emphasizes their importance and relationship. Serving sizes have also been updated to list amounts that more accurately reflect what consumers realistically eat. Example:A small bag of trail mix shows 100 calories per serving. One might assume the small bag to contain 1 serving, but it actually contains 3 servings so that eating the whole bag provides 300 calories. With the updated label, the same size bag would show 1 serving at 300 calories. Keep in mind that the serving size is not a recommendation for everyone about how much to eat, but rather a reference point. Addition of Added Sugars underneath Total Sugars. Foods and beverages high in added sugars tend to be higher in calories and are negatively associated with several health problems. However, some foods like plain dairy and fruit contain naturally occurring sugars that do not have these negative health effects. Therefore, the new label shows both Total Sugar grams and Added Sugar grams. The specific types of added sweeteners will be shown in the Ingredients list. Examples:Plain dairy milk will show 12 grams of Total Sugars (naturally occurring from lactose) per cup but zero Added Sugars. A cup of strawberry yogurt may show 20 grams of Total Sugars of which 10 grams are Added Sugars (10 grams are naturally occurring from lactose and the other 10 grams are from an added sweetener). Removal of vitamins A and C, and addition of vitamin D and potassium. Vitamins A and C had been included in previous labels when deficiencies of these nutrients were more common. They are rare today, so have been replaced with vitamin D and potassium, which can run low in the diets of some Americans. The percent Daily Value (%DV) shows how much of a nutrient in one serving of food contributes to ones approximate daily requirement for the nutrient. To best use the %DV, remember these simple guidelines: 5% DV or less of a nutrient per serving is considered low. If you are trying to follow a heart-healthy diet, you might aim for this percentage amount for items like saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars. 20% DV or more of a nutrient per serving is high. Use this amount for nutrients you want more of. For example, if you are trying to eat more nutrients to support bone health, then you may aim for this percentage amount (or higher) for calcium and vitamin D. Use the %DV to quickly compare nutrients in similar products. For example, if you are looking for a salad dressing or pasta sauce with less salt and added sugar, you can compare two different brands and choose the product with the lower %DV for sodium and added sugars. For more commentary on the updated Nutrition Facts label by Harvard nutrition experts, see the article, Updated Nutrition Facts Panel makes significant progress with added sugars, but there is room for improvement. This is the section of a food label consumers see first, which within seconds can influence their purchase. This has made it a battleground between public health advocates and food manufacturers. Food manufacturers can choose to display FOP symbols or graphics that highlight nutritional aspects of the product if they are favorable to health, such as being lower in calories or added sugar, but may leave out less favorable information such as being high in sodium or saturated fat. These graphics promote a perception of healthfulness, which can be misleading if consumers rely only on these images without reading the Nutrition Facts panel for complete information. The FDA does not closely monitor these FOP graphics. Because research has shown that positive FOP labels like health stamps or checkmarks can overrate a foods healthfulness, public health advocates have supported initiatives for FOP warning labels (e.g., traffic lights or stop signs) to highlight nutrients that are harmful to health in excess, such as sugars and fats in sweetened beverages and ultra-processed snacks. All FOP labels in the U.S. are voluntary, which allows food manufacturers to highlight or hide the nutrition information they choose to help promote or preserve sales. If warning labels became mandatory, as public health advocates propose, the pressure on manufacturers would increase to change certain products to improve their nutritional quality. These are statements reviewed by the FDA and supported by scientific evidence that suggest certain foods or diets may lower the risk of a disease or health-related condition. The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 regulates these health claims, which must undergo review by the FDA through a petition process. The FDA has approved 12 health claims on food labels such as the relationship between calcium and osteoporosis; sodium and hypertension; fiber-containing grains, fruits and vegetables and cancer; and folic acid and neural tube defects. However, just because a food contains a specific nutrient that is associated with a decreased risk of disease does not necessarily make the food healthy as a whole. An example would be a breakfast cereal high in soluble fiber for heart health but that is also high in added sugars. Research finds that consumers believe that a food carrying a health claim is healthier than a product that does not. These statements describe the nutrients in a food beyond what is listed on the Nutrition Facts label, intended to showcase a health benefit of the food. An example is Contains 100% Vitamin C. Most terms like low sodium, high fiber, reduced fat, and good source of are regulated by the FDA, and the nutrient amounts must meet specific guidelines to make these claims. Also regulated are comparative terms like less sugar or fewer calories comparing two similar products. However, these statements can mislead consumers about their overall healthfulness. For example, a bag of potato chips may advertise that it has 40% less fat and is cholesterol-free, suggesting it is a healthy food, when in reality even a healthier potato chip is still a high-calorie ultra-processed food offering little nutrition. Some terms are not yet regulated by the FDA such as natural or multigrain. As another example, see the pros and cons of health labeling for Whole Grains. The FDA oversees the ingredients listed on food labels. A packaged food must list the ingredients in order of predominance by weight. In other words, the ingredients that weigh the most are listed first. The list may contain unfamiliar terms alongside the common ingredient names. These may be added preservatives or colors (e.g., sodium bisulfite, caramel color), thickeners or emulsifiers (e.g., guar gum, carrageenan), or the scientific names of vitamins and minerals (e.g., ascorbic acid, alpha tocopherol). Ingredients like added sugars may carry many alternative names but are essentially varying combinations of fructose and glucose: evaporated cane juice, high fructose corn syrup, agave nectar, honey, brown sugar, coconut sugar, maple syrup, molasses, and turbinado sugar. Under the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004, eight major food allergensmilk, fish, tree nuts, peanuts, shellfish, wheat, eggs, and soybeansare required to be listed in a contains statement near the Ingredients list if present in a food. An example would be contains wheat, milk, and soy. Advisory statements addressing cross-contamination may also be listed such as may contain wheat or produced in a facility that also uses peanuts. On April 23, 2021, the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research (FASTER) Act became law, declaring sesame as the 9th major food allergen recognized in the US. Sesame will be a required allergen listing as of January 1, 2023. Other potential allergens include gluten and color additives such as FD&C Yellow No. 5. The FDA mandates that a product containing FD&C Yellow No. 5 must identify it on the food label. The term gluten-free can be listed on a label if it meets a specific maximum amount of gluten as defined by the FDA. These dates found on food products inform both the seller and consumer about the shelf-life and optimal quality of the product. They are determined by the food manufacturers judgment for peak quality. Foods can still be eaten safely after these dates, with the exact amount of time dependent on the food product, but the flavor and texture may begin to deteriorate. These expiration dates are not required by federal law though some states may institute their own requirements. Sell-by date: The last date the seller should display the product on shelves for purchase. Best-by date: The last date recommended to use the product for best flavor and quality. Use-by date: The last date recommended to use the product for peak freshness; this date is important for highly perishable products like fresh meats, milk, poultry, and salad blends as their quality can quickly deteriorate beyond the use-by date. Learn more about how to navigate these packaging dates to minimize food waste at home. Interactive Nutrition Facts LabelWhats New with the Nutrition Facts LabelHow to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label Health professionals and educatorsThe New Nutrition Facts LabelNutrition Education Resources & Materials References
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