

Reading Food Labels

Food labels may help you make healthy food choices.* But they can be confusing. Here are some quick tips for reading food labels:

Serving Size: All the information on a food label is based on the serving size. Be careful—one serving may be much smaller than you think. Compare what you eat to the serving size on the label.

Calories: Most women need to eat about 1,600 calories per day, with no more than 30 percent (about 480 calories) from total fat. Active women need more calories, up to 2,200 per day (no more than 660 calories from total fat).**

% Daily Value (%DV): This tells you whether a food is high or low in nutrients. Foods that have more than 20 percent daily value (20% DV) of a nutrient are high. Foods that have 5 percent daily value (5% DV) or less are low.

Saturated Fat: Saturated fat is not healthy for your heart. Compare labels on similar foods and try to choose foods that have a 5% DV or less for saturated fat.***

Trans Fat: Trans fat is not healthy for your heart. When reading food labels, add together the grams (g) of trans fat and saturated fat, and choose foods with the lowest combined amount.

Cholesterol: Too much cholesterol is not healthy for your heart. Keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol as low as possible.

Sodium: Salt contains sodium. High sodium intake is linked to higher blood pressure. Foods that contain more than 20% DV are high in sodium. Look for labels that say "sodium-free" or "low sodium." Foods that are low in sodium contain no more than 5% DV.

TIP: Many food labels say "low-fat," "reduced fat," or "light." That does not always mean the food is low in calories. Remember, fat free does not mean calorie free and calories do count!

Fiber: Choose foods that are rich in fiber, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Sugar: Try to choose foods with little or no added sugar (like low-sugar cereals).

Calcium: Choose foods that are high in calcium. Foods that are high in calcium have at least 20% DV.

* For more information on reading nutrition labels, see Using the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, available from the Federal Consumer Information Center, 1-888-878-3256 or read Guidance on How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Panel on Food Labels from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html.

** From Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2000, U.S.

Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. If you need a special diet, check with your health care provider before following these guidelines

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