

How to Read Food Labels

To make healthy food choices, it is important to read the labels on the packages of food you buy. Knowing how to read food labels can help you make better choices at the grocery store.

Serving size

The **serving size** is the amount of food you would need to eat to get the amount of listed nutrients. The **servings per container** tell how many servings are in the whole package.

Check calories

The total number of calories depends on how many servings you eat. For example, if you ate two packets of this oatmeal, you would be eating two servings. The number of calories would double to 260.

Limit saturated and trans fats

Compare brands and choose the one with less saturated fat. Always look for foods with 0g trans fat.

Increase your Fiber

Fiber makes you feel full. Compare brands and look for the ones with more fiber. Aim for at least 3 grams of fiber in grain foods such as cereal, pasta and bread.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Packet (35g)	
Servings Per Container 10	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	130
Calories from Fat	15
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 1.5g	2%
Saturated Fat 0.5g	2%
Trans Fat 0g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 0.5g	
Monounsaturated Fat 0.5g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 170mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 27g	9%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Soluble Fiber 1g	
Sugars 12g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	20%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	20%
Iron	20%
Thiamin	20%
Riboflavin	20%
Niacin	20%
Vitamin B6	20%
Folic Acid	20%
Phosphorus	10%
Magnesium	6%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	
Ingredients: Whole grain rolled oats (with oat bran), sugar, dehydrated apples (treated with sodium sulfite to promote color retention), calcium carbonate, salt, cinnamon, natural flavors, oat flour, citric acid, guar gum, vitamin A palmitate, niacinamide*, reduced iron, pyridoxine hydrochloride*, riboflavin*, thiamin mononitrate*, folic acid*.	

% Daily Values

Quick Guide to % of Daily Value

- 5% or less is **Low**
- 20% or more is **High**

Limit Sodium

Look on the front of the package for “low sodium”, “reduced sodium”, or “no salt added”. Compare brands and choose the one with less sodium.

Limit Sugar

Choose beverages with 3 grams of sugar or less. Choose foods with less than 9 grams of sugar. Compare brands and choose the one with less sugar.

Choose whole grains.

“Whole” should be in the first ingredient in grains (look for “whole wheat” or “whole grain”).

Food label from a box of instant oatmeal

What do the words on the food label mean?

Don't be fooled by words on the front of a package. Always read the food label.

Here are some of the common terms you may find on a food label:

- **Calorie.** A unit that tells you how much energy a food gives the body.
- **Saturated fat.** A fat that is solid at room temperature. It is found in things like butter, cheese, whole milk, ice cream, and meat.
- **Trans fat.** A liquid fat that is treated (hydrogenated) so it is solid at room temperature. It is in cookies, crackers, fried foods, and processed foods.
- **Unsaturated fat.** A fat that is liquid at room temperature. It is found in vegetable oils, nuts, and fish. There are 2 kinds: Poly- and Mono-unsaturated.
- **Cholesterol.** A type of fat your body needs to make vitamin D, some hormones, and other important things. It is in food products such as high-fat dairy products, egg yolks, and high-fat meat. Food cholesterol does not affect body cholesterol.
- **Sodium.** A component of salt. Almost all foods have sodium in them naturally, but processed foods have a lot of added sodium.
- **Total carbohydrate.** A combination of many types of carbohydrates: dietary fibers, sugars, and other carbohydrates.
- **Protein.** A part of food that the body needs to grow, repair itself and build muscle. It can be found in meat, fish, dairy, soy, beans, nuts, and other foods.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or dietitian if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.