

NMS Nutrition Notes

Food Labels



Picture yourself at the grocery store. You're trying to decide which foods are the healthiest choices for you. There are so many brands with all sorts of information on the packages. What are you going to buy?

Luckily, food labels can be great tools to get you through the fine print on packaged foods. Labels can help you work your way through the supermarket maze.

Nutrition information on packaged foods can be found in three different places:

Ingredient List

Nutrition Facts

Nutrition Claim

Ingredient List - An ingredient list must be included on all food labels by law. Ingredients are listed in decreasing order by weight (not volume), so what you see first is what you're getting the most of.

Nutrition Facts - This is the heading under which you'll find the detailed nutrition facts about a product. Nutrients are always listed in the same order to allow for easy scanning of information. All information refers to the food as packaged, so if you add milk, eggs, or other food, the nutritional content of the food you eat can be very different.

Nutrition Claim - A nutrition claim is used to highlight key nutrition features of a product. It is often big, bold and on the front of the package. When claims appear they must follow government laws. There are certain standards that a product must meet in order to use terms such as, "source of" and "low".



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Nutrition Facts Fundamentals

Following is an explanation of each section of the Nutrition Facts section of a food label:

Serving Size –The amount of food for which the information is given. Check the serving size, as it may not be the same as what you would eat, which means that the calories and content of nutrients will increase or decrease.

Calories – A measure of the amount of energy in a food. The Calories (Cal) is also given in kilojoules (kJ). 1 Cal = 4.18 kJ.

Fat - Shows the total amount of fat in food. Some products also give the content of various kinds of fat: polyunsaturates, monosaturates, saturates, trans fats, and cholesterol. The most useful information is the grams of total fat. Fat content in dairy products is indicated by % M.F. The higher the percentage, the more fat the food contains, and frequently more calories.

Cholesterol – This will be expressed in milligrams.

Sodium - A measure of the amount of salt in a food. Sodium is contained in: salt, sodium bicarbonate, sodium metabisulfite, monosodium glutamate, etc.

Carbohydrate - Includes the content of sugars, starch, and fibre. In the example of the left, you get a complete breakdown of carbohydrate. Sometimes you get information on one type of carbohydrate only.

Protein – This will be expressed in milligrams.

Vitamins & Minerals - Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Calcium and Iron are expressed as a percentage of the highest recommended amount. This percentage represents the portion of vitamin or mineral that the food provides compared with the highest recommended intake to meet the requirements.



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Nutrition Claim Clarification

Here is a list of claims that you may see on labels, and what they really mean:

CALORIES

Calorie-Reduced - Contains 50% or fewer calories than the regular version.

Low Calorie - This food is calorie-reduced and contains 15 Calories or less per serving.

Calorie-Free - Contains no more than 1 Calorie per 100 g.

Source of Energy - Contains at least 100 Calories per serving as indicated on the label.

SODIUM

Low Sodium or Low Salt - Contains 50% less sodium than the regular product and not more than 40 mg of sodium per 100 g (except for cheddar cheese, it may contain up to 50 mg of sodium per 100 g and meat/poultry/fish may contain up to 80 mg of sodium per 100 g), no salt has been added.

No Added Salt or Unsalted - No salt is added to the food and none of the ingredients contains a large quantity of salt.

Salt-Free or Sodium-Free - The food does not contain more than 5 mg of sodium per 100 g; foods bearing this claim are usually those containing the smallest amount of salt or sodium.

VITAMIN OR MINERAL

Source of, Contains - At least 5% of the recommended daily intake. If the claim is about vitamin C it means at least 5% of the recommended daily intake.

Good Source, High In - At least 15% of the recommended daily intake. If the claim is about vitamin C it means at least 30% of the recommended daily intake.

Excellent Source, Very High In, Rich In - At least 25% of the recommended daily intake. If the claim is about vitamin C it means at least 50% of the recommended daily intake.

FAT

Low in Fat - No more than 3 g of fat per serving. Low in fat does not always mean low in calories.

Fat-Free - No more than 0.1 g of fat per 100 g.

Low in Saturated Fatty Acids - No more than 2 g of saturated fatty acids per serving and no more than 15% of the energy derived from these. It does not always mean that the food is low in total fat.

Trans Fat Free - Contains less than 0.2 g of trans fatty acids per reference amount and serving of stated size.

CHOLESTEROL

Low in Cholesterol - No more than 20 mg of cholesterol per serving and per 100 g. Product must be low in saturated fat, but food might still have high total fat content.

Cholesterol-free - No more than 3 mg of cholesterol per 100 g.

GENERAL TERM

Light or Lite - These terms can only be defined in comparison to the regular product. When comparing, you will find that the light product has a nutrient that has been reduced (sugar, salt, fat, etc) a minimum of 25% in comparison to the regular product. A minimum of 25% is required, but it can be more of a reduction. Beware, claims such as light texture, light taste, or light tasting do not mean that the food contains less of a specific nutritional element (for example, salt or fat), but simply that its consistency or flavour is light.



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