



Children's Hospital Boston
Preventive Cardiology

Reading Food Labels—1,2,3!

To protect yourself and family against heart disease, it is important to know what you are eating. Specifically, the types of fat in the product should be the RIGHT type of fat to protect against heart disease. Food labels, or 'Nutrition Facts' were updated several years ago to make them simpler to read. It is important to know how to use them in order to choose heart healthy food products in the grocery stores. Start with the three easy steps to reading a food label and choosing a healthy product.

1. Check the serving size on the label.

Many of the serving sizes are small and unrealistic for one sitting. Therefore, determine the number of servings typically eaten at one sitting.

Example: A twenty ounce sweetened drink may say that the serving size is 2.5 servings in one bottle. Unless you share the bottle with someone else, you will be drinking the whole 2.5 servings.

2. Find out what the amount you eat REALLY contains for calories, fat, carbohydrate and protein.

Take the calories, grams and milligrams on the food labels for protein, carbohydrate and fat and multiply those numbers by the number of servings eaten at one sitting. This will give you the total amounts for the portion you are actually eating.

Example: The twenty ounce drink bottle lists the nutrition facts for 1 serving but it actually contains 2.5 times each listed nutrient. This includes sugar!

3. Compare the numbers you've calculated to your total daily recommendations below.

Your Daily Recommendations

Calories:

Calories listed are the total amount per serving of the product. The calories come from all nutrients in the product.

- **Calculating your calories:** Weight in pounds x 11.4 (If you want weight loss, subtract 250-500 calories daily for ½-1 pound weight loss).

Total Fat:

The number listed on the fat label is the total fat in the product per serving. Remember that the total fat per day can add up quickly! The fat listed does not separate out healthy fats vs. unhealthy fats.

- Goal: <50 grams of total fat per day

Monounsaturated and Polyunsaturated Fat:

These are heart healthy fats that may not be listed on the label. If a product contains these fats, they are a wiser choice than the saturated fats, as long as they fit into your total goals for the day.

Saturated Fat:

Saturated fat is an unhealthy fat choice often found in products containing fat from animal origin or from trans-fats. Since saturated fats can increase the LDL-cholesterol, or lousy cholesterol, it is important to limit the amount during the course of the day.

- Goal: <12 grams per day

Trans Fats:

Trans-fats are not listed in the "Nutrition Facts" Label, but found in the ingredients list. Trans-fats are partially-hydrogenated fat, that is an unhealthy fat because it acts like a saturated fat, and can raise your cholesterol levels. Its best to avoid products with trans-fats.

Cholesterol:

Cholesterol is found in products of animal origin, or products made with ingredients of animal origin. Cholesterol can add up, so keep an eye on the total amount you may get during the course of the day.

- Goal: <200 mg per day

Sodium:

Sodium is found in table salt. Many adults eat more than 3 times the amount of sodium than recommended. Sodium is important in the diet, but too much can make you retain water and make your heart work harder. Many processed foods have hidden sources of sodium in them, so it is important to look at a label as well as the serving size to find out how much sodium you will actually consume.

- Goal: <2000mg per day

Fiber:

Fiber is the non digestible form of carbohydrate, and is either soluble or insoluble. Soluble fiber is associated with heart health, but it is important to include both types of fiber. Fiber can help you feel full, as well as contribute to good bowel health.

- Goal: 25 grams or more

Sugar: No standards set. With elevated triglyceride levels, it is more effective to limit total carbohydrates and simple sugars such as sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, etc.

Daily Values: How valuable are they to use?

The percentages, called Daily Values, found on the far right do not provide accurate information for children or for those trying to prevent heart disease. They are the percentage met of these nutrients but are based on higher calorie diets.

Concentrate on calories, fat and saturated fat. Fiber, sodium and total carbohydrates may also be of benefit to patients, such as total carbohydrates for patients with high triglycerides or diabetes.