

# Living Right®

Your Health and Wellness Awareness Bulletin

July 2015

Food  
Labels

## Read the label – it's worth your time

A colorful package or clever name might catch your eye, but the smaller print on a food label should hold more sway over whether an item goes into your cart.

A label's Nutrition Facts graphic, list of ingredients, and gluten-free and organic information can help you determine whether a product is the healthier choice.

### By the numbers

On the Nutrition Label:

- **5 percent** of Daily Value or less is low. Choose products with low amounts of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium.
- **20 percent** or more of Daily Value is high. Products with high amounts of fiber, calcium, vitamins, and iron will help you get your recommended daily amount of these nutrients.



Using this information doesn't have to dramatically increase the time spent at the grocery store. Familiarizing yourself with common label elements can help you learn where your dietary red flags are located.

For example, the sodium percentage on the Nutrition Facts label could be a key element for a person on a low-sodium diet. The term "gluten-free" might be crucial for someone with celiac disease. Others might scan the label for sugars, fiber, or fats.

Checking for this information can help you quickly decide whether a food should be a regular part of your diet, saved for special occasions, or avoided altogether.

## Make the Facts work for you

The Nutrition Facts label reveals the secrets of packaged foods, if you know where to look:

1. **Start at the top.** The Serving Size and Servings Per Container are the first items listed on the Nutrition Facts label. If the Serving Size is one cup, make sure you understand how many one-cup servings are in a container. Many packaged foods that a person may consider a single portion actually contain multiple servings. For example, a 20-ounce soda may contain 2.5 servings and a 3-ounce bag of chips could be 3 servings.
2. **Check the calories.** Generally, 40 calories is low, 100 is moderate, and 400 or more is high. Calorie count is calculated per serving, so if there are 250 calories per serving and the box has two servings, the total for the package is 500 calories.
3. **Play the percentages.** Percent Daily Value tells you how much of a nutrient is in one serving, compared to the amount you need each day. For example, a product showing sodium at 20 percent means the product contains 20 percent of your recommended sodium intake for the day.
4. **Fight the fats.** The label shows the Calories from Fat in each serving, as well as information about the types of fat in the product. For example, if there are 250 calories in a serving and 110 come from fat, almost half of the product's calories are due to fat. The Total Fat and types of fat are listed in the next section. It's best to keep your intake of saturated and trans fat as low as possible.
5. **Focus on fiber.** Fiber aids digestion and is an important component of good nutrition. A "high fiber" food must have at least 5 grams of fiber per serving.



## 'Organic' products must stick to the rules

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has set forth specific requirements for organic farmers, ranchers, and food processors to follow before their food can carry the label "organic." To make certain the requirements are being followed, the organic food must be verified by a USDA-accredited certifying agent.

### Organic crops

The USDA organic seal verifies that the following were not used in crop production:

- Irradiation,
- Sewage sludge,
- Synthetic fertilizers,
- Prohibited pesticides, and
- Genetically modified organisms.



### Organic livestock

The USDA organic seal verifies that producers:

- Met animal health and welfare standards,
- Did not use antibiotics or growth hormones,
- Used 100 percent organic feed, and
- Provided animals with access to the outdoors.

### Organic multi-ingredient foods

The USDA organic seal verifies that the product has 95 percent or more certified organic content.

## Understanding the gluten-free label

**What is gluten?** It is a mixture of proteins that occur naturally in wheat, rye, barley, and crossbreeds of these grains.

**Why is the gluten-free label important?** A study conducted by Mayo Clinic and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that about 1 in 141 Americans have celiac disease, a digestive disease that damages or destroys the villi in the small intestine and interferes with nutrient absorption from food.

Long-term complications can lead to more serious health issues such as osteoporosis, anemia, and diabetes. Following a strict gluten-free diet is the only treatment for celiac disease. It can help manage symptoms and promote healing.

**Why does 'gluten-free' need to be defined?** Prior to the 2014 rule there were no federal standards or definitions for the food industry to use in labeling products "gluten-free." An estimated 5 percent of foods formerly labeled as such actually contained 20 parts per million (ppm) or more of gluten.

**What does gluten-free mean?** As of August 2014, any food labeled gluten-free must meet specific standards as determined by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Specifically, it must contain less than 20 ppm of gluten.

The gluten-free label also may be used on foods that are inherently gluten-free or do not contain an ingredient that:

- Is a gluten-containing grain, such as spelt wheat;
- Is derived from a gluten-containing grain that has not been processed to remove gluten (e.g., wheat flour); or
- Is derived from a gluten-containing grain that has been processed to remove gluten (e.g., wheat starch), if the use of that ingredient results in the presence of 20 ppm or more gluten in the food.

### An ingredient by any other name ...

A food label contains a list of ingredients, in order of quantity. The closer an ingredient is to the beginning of the list, the more of it there is in the product.

Because some ingredients have a number of names, you may not always be aware of how much is sneaking into a product. For example, a product containing both sugar and maltose would have more added sugar than a product with sugar alone.

To make sure you're aware of what you're eating, look for these aliases:

- Sugar: Corn syrup, brown sugar, nectar, maltose, dextrose, honey, maple syrup, fructose, molasses, sucrose.
- Sodium: Salt, sodium nitrate, sodium bicarbonate, monosodium glutamate.
- Trans fat: Partially hydrogenated oil, hydrogenated oil.



Next month:  
Ergonomics

