Understanding Food Labels

Created by Maureen Lyons for Wildwood CACFP, May 2019

A lot has changed in American's diets since the Nutrition Facts Label first appeared on food packages in 1992. Rates of obesity, heart disease, and cancer are increasing, and portions sizes have become larger than ever before. Nutrition science has made new discoveries and connections between the food we eat and the health of our nation. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) has updated the design and requirements for the Nutrition Facts Label to make it easier to read and help consumers make informed food choices for their families.

An attractive label initially helps sell the product to the consumer and provides information about the product identity, quality, nutrition, and relevant health and safety information.

Five pieces of information are required on all food labels:

- A statement of identity
- A net weight on contents statement
- An ingredient statement
- A statement that gives the name and place of business of the product's manufacturer, packer, or distributor (including the country of origin for imported foods)
- The Nutrition Facts label

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Parts of a food label:

Statement of Identity

This statement describes the product and tells the common name of the food. Examples: yogurt, pasta, cereal, milk, beans, pizza, and SO many more. A unique or fanciful name may be used if no common name exists as long as the name describes the product for the consumer to understand what the product is.
A brand name is different than the statement of identity.

Net Weight or Contents Statement

The edible product in the container is listed by weight, volume, or numerical count depending on the product. The weight and volume must be listed in both English and metric units.

(The weight or contents statement must be located on the lower 30% of the container.)

Ingredient Statement

The list of ingredients in the product is listed below the Nutrition Facts panel. The ingredients are listed by their common or usual name in descending order by weight. For example: If "whole wheat" is listed first, that ingredient is found in the largest amount in weight in the product. The ingredient listed last contributes the least or smallest amount by weight.

Food manufacturers may include the name of a food allergen in parenthesis following the common or usual name of the food source if the name isn't listed elsewhere. For example, if the term "enriched flour" occurs in the list of ingredients, it might be followed in parenthesis by the word "wheat," which can be a food allergen, plus other substances found in the flour, such as various B vitamins and iron.

Ingredients Statement and Allergen Labeling; Eight allergens must be identified:

- **Eggs**
- **Milk**
- **Wheat**
- **Peanuts**
- **Type of Tree Nuts**
- **Type of Fish**
- **Type of Shellfish**

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Allergen labeling is required if a food product contains one or more of the eight allergens: Eggs, Milk, Wheat, Soy, Peanuts, other types of Tree Nuts, Fish, and Crustacean Shellfish

The type of tree nut, fish, or other shell fish must be clearly listed.

While more than 160 foods have been identified as the cause of food allergies in sensitive individuals, these eight major food allergens account for over 90 percent of all documented food allergies. They also represent the foods most likely to cause severe or life-threatening reactions.

<u>The allergens can be identified on the label in two ways:</u>

Either within the ingredient statement OR a statement below the ingredient statement that calls out any allergens contained. Both options are shown below.

Ingredients: whole grain rolled oats, sugar, flavored fruit pieces (dehydrated apples treated with sodium sulfite to promote color retention), creaming agent (maltodextrin, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, whey, sodium caseinate) … CONTAINS MILK INGREDIENTS.

Ingredients: sugar, full cream milk powder, wheat flour, cocoa butter vegetable fat, emulsifiers (soya lecithin, 476) cocoa, yeast, salt, glucose syrup (derived from corn). Made on equipment that also processes products containing nuts.

Some labels will say …the product is made on equipment that also processes products containing nuts.

The left-hand label (above) contains whey and sodium caseinate (milk allergens). Also listed, Contains: Milk ingredients.

The right-hand label (above) contains full cream milk powder (milk allergen), wheat flour (wheat allergen), and the statement made on equipment that also processes products containing nuts (tree nuts allergen).

Usually soybean oil and soy lecithin do not contain enough soy allergen to cause an allergic reaction. But each individual is different, so someone could be more sensitive than others to these products.

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Statement with Name and Place of Business

This statement can be for the: product manufacturer, packaging facility, or distributor.


BRAN, SUGAR, BROWN SUGAR SYRUP, CONTAINS 2% OR LESS OF SALT, MALTED BARLEY SYRUP.
VITAMINS AND MINERALS: POTASSIUM CHLORIDE, NIACINAMIDE, ZINC OXIDE, REDUCED IRON, VITAMIN A PALMITATE, PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE (VITAMIN B_6), RIBOFLAVIN (VITAMIN B_2), THIAMIN MONONITRATE (VITAMIN B_1), FOLIC ACID, VITAMIN D, VITAMIN B_{12}.
CONTAINS: WHEAT

DISTRIBUTED BY HY-VEE, INC.
WEST DES MOINES, IA 50266

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This statement provides the food product's manufacturer, packer, or distributor. It may consist of a business name, city, and zip code if the address can be found in a public directory under the business name. Otherwise the complete address must be given.

See the example to the left which shows the distributor for this particular item.

Country of Origin

Required by U.S. Customs and Border Protection for imported foods

Did you know that food served in USDA funded programs like those that participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program are required to be of US Origin? Keep this in mind when you are shopping for food at the grocery store. Produce and frozen fish are the most likely food to be sources from outside the U.S.

Let's compare the old and new food label

As mentioned earlier, it has been a long time since the original Nutrition Facts label was introduced. The label is being updated to help consumers use the information to make decisions about the food they eat. Most food companies are now using the new Nutrition Facts Label.

Compare the two labels. What changes do you see?

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Example of the changes are:

- Size of print for serving size and calories
- Added sugars
- No vitamin A or C
- Vitamin D and Potassium added
- % Daily Value information presented differently

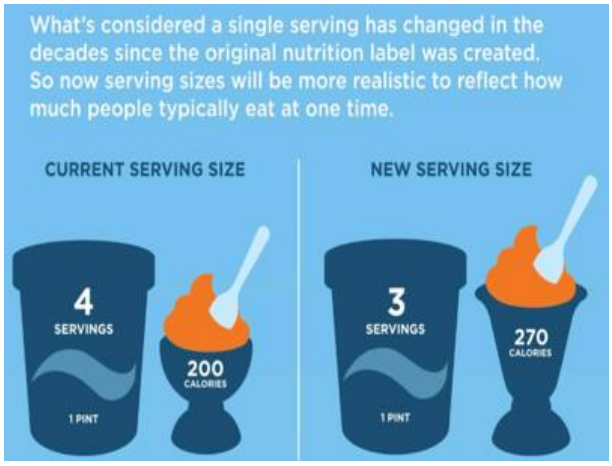
Which label is easier to use?

The **% Daily Value** helps consumers determine what nutrients are in the food product and if that nutrient is high, or low. If 20% or more of a nutrient, it is high; and 5% or less of a nutrient, it is low. The % Daily Value is based on a 2,000-calorie diet.

- The daily values have been updated based on the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines.
- Serving size is now based on what people actually eat instead of what we should eat. This has changed over time as food has become readily available and portion sizes have increased.
- Added sugars are now listed on the label to inform consumers how much sugar is **added** to the food product. This is different than the natural sugars that are already in the product or food.
- Changes in nutrients required on the label were made because Vitamin D and potassium are nutrients that Americans do not get enough of in their diet. Vitamin D is important in bone health and potassium helps to lower blood pressure.

Serving sizes are more realistic and reflect how much people typically eat at one time. Serving sizes must be based on the amount of the food or beverage that people actually eat not what they should eat. (Keep in mind that serving sizes on food packaging does NOT reflect CACFP guidelines for the various age-groups served.)

Packaging affects how much we eat and drink. If you drink the entire bottle at one time, it is considered one serving. The Nutrition Facts information is based on the serving size given for the food.



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Nutrient Content Claims: Various terms have been used to describe nutrients in foods. When used on food labels, these terms have a consistent meaning.

"Reduced fat" is an approved definition.

Note: If you had a container of reduce fat, low fat or regular mayonnaise, you could compare the Nutrition Facts on the products. Examples: How much fat is in each product, and how many calories per serving does each contain?

Approved definitions for terms associated with calories and fat.

Calorie free	less than 5 calories per serving
Reduced calorie	at least 25% fewer calories than regular version
Low calorie	40 calories or less per serving
Fat free	less than 0.5 grams fat per serving (trans or saturated)
Reduced fat	at least 25% less fat than regular version
Low fat	3 grams or less of fat per serving

Approved terms for sugar, sodium, and light/lite.

Sugar free	less than 5 calories per serving
Reduced sugar	at least 25% less sugar than regular version
No added sugar	no sugars added during processing or packing, including ingredients that contain sugar such as juice or dry fruit
Sodium free	less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
Reduced sodium	at least 25% less sodium than regular version
Low sodium	140 mg or less sodium per serving
Light/Lite	1/3 fewer calories or 50% less fat than regular version

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Descriptor terms such as high, rich in, excellent source are defined

High, rich in, excellent source of:	20% or more of Daily Value
Good source of, contains, provides:	10% to 19% of Daily Value
More, enriched, fortified, added:	10% or more of Daily Value

Newer Terminology Included on Food Labels

Gluten Free Labeling

In 2014, "gluten free" "without gluten", "free of gluten" and "no gluten" was defined by FDA. Previously these terms were not required, and the consumer could not be sure that the product did not contained gluten. Now foods labeled with these terms cannot contain an ingredient that has any type of wheat, rye, barley or crossbreeds of these grains or an ingredient derived from these grains without a processing step to remove gluten.

Healthy

In 2016, FDA has proposed that the term "Healthy" have a standard definition. Food manufacturers can use the term if their product is not low in total fat but has a fat profile made of mostly mono and polyunsaturated fats OR contain at least 10 % of the Daily Value of potassium or Vitamin D.

Natural

Currently the term "Natural" does not have a definition, but FDA is considering a standard definition for Natural.

Gluten Free, Without Gluten, Free of Gluten, or No Gluten: Foods cannot contain wheat, rye, barley or cross breeds of these grains (2014)

Healthy (proposed in 2016): Food not low in total fat but has fat profile of mostly mono and polyunsaturated fats OR contain at least 10% of the Daily Value of potassium or Vitamin D

Natural: Currently no definition

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Health Claims must be supported

A Health Claim describes a relationship between a food, food component or dietary supplement AND a reduced risk for a specific disease or health condition

Health Claims are based-on extensive research.

There are several approved health claims about cancer risk or other diseases.

For example: "Diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods and low in saturated fat and cholesterol may help reduce the risk of heart disease."

Dates listed on food products

"Use By" Date (or expiration date)

- The last date recommended for the use of the food product while it is at peak quality.
- Infant formula is required to have a "Use By", do not purchase formula that is past this date.

"Sell-By" Date

- Shows how long to display the product for sale in a store. Consumers should buy the food product before this "sell by" date.

"Best if Used by (or Before)" Date

- Reflects the best flavor or quality of the product. This date is not a purchase or safety date.
- In a new industry-wide effort to reduce consumer confusion about product date labels, grocery manufacturers and retailers have joined together to adopt standard wording on packaging about the quality and safety of products. The new voluntary initiative streamlines the various date labels on food packaging down to just two standard phrases.
  - ✓ **"BEST If Used By"** describes product quality, where the product may not taste or perform as expected but is safe to use or consume.
  - ✓ **"USE By"** applies to the few products that are highly perishable and/or have a food safety concern over time; these products should be consumed by the date listed on the package – and disposed of after that date.
- Because these standards are voluntary, there is no guarantee that every company will adopt them. In some states, there may be labeling regulations that preempt the industry standards.

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Proper Storage of Refrigerated Foods

After the date listed on a product passes, the food may not be the best flavor or texture, but the product should be safe, wholesome and of good quality, if it has been handled and stored properly. Many foods can be used beyone the date listed on the package

Refrigerated foods should be safe if they are regrigerated promptly after purchase and stored at 40^0 F or below.

Proper Storage of Canned Foods

If canned foods are not exposed to temperature extremes (above 90^0 F or below 32^0 F) and the cans are not dented, rusted or swollen, they are safe to eat.

Discard dented, rusted or swollen cans, as may contain foodbourne toxins like botulism if the seal has been broken.

High acid foods (i.e. tomatoes & fruits) keep peak quality for 12 to 18 months.

Low acid foods (i.e. meats, vegetables, and mixed foods) keep 2 to 5 years if stored in a cool dark place.

Proper Egg Storage

- The date on egg cartons is either a “Sell By” or “Use By” date.
- The date listed can’t be more than 45 days from pack date of eggs.
- Always purchase eggs before “Sell By” or “Use By” date.
- Refrigerate eggs in the original carton to maintain best quality and freshness.
- Place eggs in coldest part of refrigerator, not the door. (Placing eggs in the refrigerator door shortens the useful life due to frequent temperature fluxuations.)
- For best quality, use eggs within 3 to 5 weeks of purchase.
- The date on the carton may have passed but the eggs are safe to use.

Hormone Free

When considering hormones in foods, it is important to make a distinction between the different wording used on food labels: “free of hormones” and “no hormones added” or “raised without hormones” may all have the same meaning. Any food that is or has been alive naturally contains hormones as part of the growth process, including some plants. There is no such thing as “hormone free” meat or animal products, which means that most of the food we eat contains hormones naturally. The best option to look for on food products is “No added hormones”.

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GMO Free

In today's market place, you may find foods promoted as "GMO free" or "contains no GMOs." Before you pay extra for this food, be aware it may not be made with any ingredients that contain GMOs in the first place. In other words, the same type of food without that label may also be free of GMO ingredients.

Before being placed on the market, any food that is genetically modified must be approved by the Food and Drug Administration, the USDA and the Environmental Protection Agency. These foods are carefully tested to ensure safety and quality.

Question: Which of the banana on the right is a GMO food?

Answer: Neither of them are GMO foods and never have been.

Ask yourself if you are you paying extra for a food when none of its ingredients contained GMOs in the first place?

Non-GMO Labelled

no label

Food Label Summary

Reading and understanding food labels is a matter of awareness of key parts and terminology on the label. Food labeling can help consumers make educated decision about the food they purchase, but can also add confusion because of undefined terms, like natural, which does not have a set of rules or requirement to use the word on labeling. Although portion sizes have changed over time, healthy options are those foods that have lower calories and sodium, fewer added sugar and reduced fat than their less healthy counterparts. Become a label reader to shop smarter and find nutritious options every day.

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When you have completed this course, click HERE to take the test.
(or you can type this address into your browser:)

https://tinyurl.com/y3ubum7a

Be sure to read each field carefully to ensure that you receive an accurate certificate.

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