

# Use The New Food Label To “SHOP SMART”



A new food label appears on packages of almost all processed foods.

The new label can help you “Shop Smart” and make food choices for a healthful diet.

**HERE’S HOW!**

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Virginia Cooperative Extension



VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE  
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VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

# Follow the Dietary Guidelines

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You can use the new label to make food choices according to the **Dietary Guidelines for Americans**. These guidelines, developed by nutrition and health experts, emphasize the importance of a well-balanced diet:

*Eat a variety of foods.*

*Maintain a healthy weight.*

*Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.*

*Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grain products.*

*Use sugars only in moderation.*

*Use salt and sodium only in moderation.*

*If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.*

# Look for Nutrient Content Claims

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When shopping, look for nutrient content claims such as “free” and “low” on the front of food packages. These terms signal that a food is low in certain nutrients, such as calories, fat, and sodium. You can use them to “budget” your intake of these nutrients. Look for terms such as “good source” and “high” and use them to identify foods that have significant amounts of certain nutrients, such as dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

You can believe nutrient content claims that appear on the new label because they can be used only if foods meet legal standards set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Examples of standards for nutrient content claims are:

*Fat free: less than 0.5 g fat per serving.*

*Good source of fiber: 2.5 g to 4.9 g fiber per serving.*

*Sodium free: less than 5 mg sodium per serving.*

# Look for Health Claims

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You can use health claims, which appear on the front of food packages, to identify foods with certain nutritional qualities related to risk factors and wellness. These are claims about the relationship between a nutrient or a food and the risk of a disease or health-related condition. Health claims can be used on the new label only if foods meet specific nutrient requirements set by the FDA. Health claims cannot be used on labels for infant formulas and for foods for children under two years of age.

An example of a health claim relating fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables to cancer is:

*“Development of cancer depends on many factors. Eating a diet low in fat and high in grain products, fruits, and vegetables that contain dietary fiber may reduce your risk for some types of cancer.”*

In order for this claim to be used on the label, the food must be “low fat,” a “good source of dietary fiber,” and either must be or must contain a grain product, fruit, or vegetable.

All together, the FDA allows claims about 7 diet-disease relationships.

*Calcium and osteoporosis*

*Fat and cancer*

*Sodium and hypertension (high blood pressure)*

*Saturated fat and cholesterol and coronary heart disease*

*Fiber containing grain products, fruits, vegetables, and cancer*

*Fruits and vegetables and cancer*

*Fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain fiber and coronary heart disease*

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# Read the Nutrition Facts

When shopping, read the "Nutrition Facts" panel from the side or back of a food package. The "Nutrition Facts" will help you determine how a particular food fits into your total daily diet. How does it do this?

First, read the **SERVING SIZE** information shown on the top portion of the panel. Serving sizes are standardized so similar products now have similar serving sizes and are closer to amounts that people actually eat. This makes it easy for you to compare the nutrients contained in a serving of similar foods. Total calories and calories from fat also are shown to help you meet recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines. It is recommended that you get no more than 30 percent of your calories per day from fat.

Next, read the **NUTRIENT LIST** that appears in the middle portion of the panel. The list includes nutrients that you need to consider when planning a well-balanced diet. These nutrients are total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. The amount of each of the nutrients in a serving of the food is listed in grams.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)			
Servings Per Container 4			
Amount Per Serving			
<b>Calories</b> 90	Calories from Fat 30		
% Daily Value*			
<b>Total Fat</b> 3g	<b>5%</b>		
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0%</b>		
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>		
<b>Sodium</b> 300mg	<b>13%</b>		
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 13g	<b>4%</b>		
Dietary Fiber 3g			
Sugars 3g	<b>12%</b>		
<b>Protein</b> 3g			
Vitamin A 80%	Vitamin C 60%		
Calcium 4%	Iron 4%		
* 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
Fiber		25g	30g
Calories per gram:			
Fat	9	Carbohydrate	4
		Protein	4

You also will notice **PERCENT DAILY VALUES** (% Daily Values) listed for the nutrients in a serving of the food. The % Daily Values are new reference numbers that are based on a 2,000-calorie diet. You can use them to determine what a serving of a food contributes to your daily nutrient needs. They will help you decide if a food contributes a lot or a little of the nutrients. Look to see if the nutrients that you want to get more of (such as carbohydrates, dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals) have high percentages. Check to be sure that the nutrients you may want to limit (such as fat, cholesterol, and sodium) have low percentages. The idea is for you to use the % Daily Values to quickly compare foods and to see how foods fit into your total daily diet.

**WHAT IF YOUR ENERGY NEEDS ARE GREATER THAN OR LESS THAN 2,000 CALORIES PER DAY?** Well, some new labels, at least those on larger packages of food, will have a table at the bottom to help you. In the table, amounts of selected nutrients (such as total fat, saturated fat, and dietary fiber) needed for a 2,500-calorie diet are listed in grams. You can compare the amount of these nutrients with the amounts listed (in grams) for the nutrients in a serving of the food. This will help you, in a relative way, to determine what the food contributes to your diet.

\* This label is only a sample. Exact specifications are in the final rules.  
Source: Food and Drug Administration 1993

## “Shop Smart”



“Shop Smart”  
and make good food choices.

The new food label has plenty of information to help you, so take the time to read it. Remember the **Dietary Guidelines** and use the new label to make food choices that fit into your total daily diet.

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**Your Local Extension Office**



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