

**USE THE NEW
FOOD LABEL TO
CHOOSE A DIET
LOW IN FAT,
SATURATED FAT,
AND CHOLESTEROL**



Virginia Cooperative Extension



VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
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One of the Dietary Guidelines, for Americans over two years of age, is to choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. A diet high in fat, especially saturated fat, increases your risk for heart disease, some types of cancer, and obesity.

The new food label can help you choose a diet low in fats and cholesterol. Here is an overview of what to look for on the label.

Nutrient Content Claims

Claims such as “low fat” and “cholesterol free” may appear on the front of food packages. They describe the fat content of products and can be used only if products meet standards set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Here are some examples.

To be:

Fat free

Low fat

Reduced or less fat

Low saturated fat

Cholesterol free

Low cholesterol

Lean

(meat, poultry, seafood)

Extra Lean

(meat, poultry, seafood)

The food must have:

Less than 0.5 gram (g) fat per serving

3 g or less fat per serving*

At least 25% less fat than reference food**

1 g or less per serving and not more than 15% of calories from saturated fat

Less than 2 milligrams (mg) cholesterol and 2 g or less of saturated fat per serving

20 mg or less of cholesterol and 2 g or less of saturated fat per serving*

Less than 10 g of total fat, less than 4 g saturated fat, and less than 95 mg cholesterol per reference amount

Less than 5 g total fat, less than 2 g saturated fat, and less than 95 mg cholesterol per reference amount

**If the serving is 30 g or less or 2 Tbsp or less, per 50 g of the food.*

***A reference food is the full-fat version of the food.*

Health Claims

Health claims on some food packages relate fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol to coronary heart disease and cancer. Food products must meet certain nutrient requirements, set by the FDA, to make these claims. A few examples are:

“Development of heart disease depends on many factors, but its risk may be reduced by diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol and healthy lifestyles.” Nutrient requirements for this claim are: “low saturated fat,” “low cholesterol,” and “low fat” products; or “extra lean” fish and game meats.

“Development of cancer depends on many factors. A diet low in total fat may reduce the risk for some cancers.” Nutrient requirements for this claim are: “low fat” products or “extra lean” fish and game meats.

56536 A1162 no. 348- 077 VPI Spec "Nutrition Facts"

The "Nutrition Facts" on the side or back of a food package tells you how much fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol is in a serving of food.

Serving Size

Serving size, the basis for measuring fat content of food, is shown in the top portion of the "Nutrition Facts." Serving sizes for foods have been standardized, so it is easy for you to compare the amount of fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol in a serving of similar foods, such as whole milk and skim milk, or butter and margarine. If you eat more, or less, than the recommended serving size, the amount of fats must be adjusted accordingly.

Calories and Calories from Fat

Calories and calories from fat are listed in the "Nutrition Facts." The value for calories is the total calories supplied by carbohydrates, protein, and fat in a serving of the food. "Calories from fat" is the number of calories that are supplied only by fat. This number is included in the total calories. It is obtained by multiplying the grams of fat in a serving by 9, which is the number of calories per gram of fat. Numbers that appear on the label may be rounded.

Nutrition experts recommend that you get no more than 30% of your calories each day from fat. This applies to your total daily diet and not to one meal or one food item. It is important that you include some fat in your diet because it is a source of energy, supplies essential fatty acids, and helps your body absorb the fat-soluble vitamins: A, D, E, and K.

Total Fat

The amount of total fat in a serving of food is shown in two ways: (1) by weight (g), and (2) as a percentage of the Daily Value (% Daily Value). The % Daily Values for total fat as well as saturated fat are based on a 2,000-calorie reference diet, which is about right for most moderately active women, teenage girls, and sedentary men. Active women, teenage boys, and many men may need more.

The % Daily Value for total fat can be used to

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)		
Servings Per Container 4		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories 90	Calories from Fat 30	
% Daily Value*		
Total Fat 3g	5%	
Saturated Fat 0g	0%	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%	
Sodium 300mg	13%	
Total Carbohydrate 13g	4%	
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%	
Sugars 3g		
Protein 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:		
	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

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

determine how a food fits into your total daily diet.

A high value means that a serving of a food contributes a lot of total fat to your diet, and a low value means that it contributes a little. For example, the label shown here indicates that a serving of the food supplies only 5% of your daily needs for total fat.

Saturated Fat

The amount of saturated fat in a serving of food is listed in grams (g) and as a % Daily Value. Nutrition experts recommend that you get no more than 10% of your calories each day from saturated fat because it tends to increase blood cholesterol levels. This type of fat is found mostly in animal foods, such as whole milk, cream cheese, butter, and meat. Some vegetable oils, such as coconut oil and palm kernel oil, used in processed foods also contain saturated fat.

Cholesterol

The amount of cholesterol in a serving of food is listed in milligrams (mg) and in % Daily Value. It is recommended that you limit your intake of cholesterol to 300 mg per day, regardless of the amount of calories you need. Cholesterol is found only in animal products, such as meat, poultry, eggs, fish, milk products, and lard.

Daily Energy Needs

If your daily energy needs exceed 2,000 calories, labels on larger food packages have footnotes, like the one shown here, to help you. The amount of fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol needed for a 2,500-calorie diet is listed in grams. These amounts can be compared with those listed (in grams) in the nutrient list for a serving of the food. This will help you to determine what a food contributes to your diet.

In the footnote are the number of calories per gram of fat, carbohydrates, and protein. As you can see, a gram of fat has more than twice the calories of a gram of either carbohydrate or protein, so a diet low in fat can help you maintain a healthy weight.



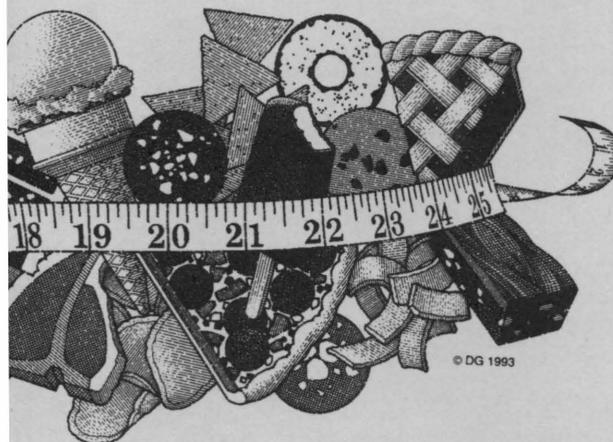
Ingredient List

All foods made from more than one ingredient have an ingredient list. For example, bread, peanut butter, margarine, mayonnaise, and salad dressing are foods that have ingredient lists. Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. Those present in the greatest amount are listed first, and those present in the least amount are listed last.

The list tells you the amount and type of fat in the food. If ingredients such as coconut oil, butter, cream, or palm oil are at the beginning of the list, the food contains a large amount of fat, especially saturated fat. If ingredients such as soybean oil, corn oil, or canola oil are at the beginning of the list, the product is high in fat, but the fat is unsaturated.

Food Preparation

In most cases, the amount of total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol listed on the label refers to the amount present in a serving of food as it is packaged, or before you prepare it. If fats such as margarine, bacon, gravy, or cream sauce are used as seasonings, the amount of fat and cholesterol in a serving of the food increases. Therefore, it is important to limit fats used as seasonings. Alternatives are lemon juice, herbs, spices, and yogurt.



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This fact sheet is based on information from:

USDA. 1993. "Choose a Diet Low in Fat, Saturated Fat, and Cholesterol." U.S. Dept. of Agric., Home and Garden Bulletin No. 253-4, Washington, DC.

FDA. 1993. "Focus on Food Labeling: An FDA Special Consumer Report." Food and Drug Admin., Washington, DC.

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