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# Considering... The Nutrition Facts Label

A Guide to Understanding and Choosing the Right Foods for Your Heart Health

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If reading a food's nutrition label confuses you, you're probably not alone. But reading and understanding a nutrition label is easier than you may think. In fact, it's like reading the table of contents of a book: it tells you what's inside. The key is taking your time and reading carefully. The following information, which breaks down the major parts of a nutrition label, will help you to make quick, informed, and healthy decisions about the foods that you eat.

## 1. Serving Size

- ❖ A nutrition label always lists the *serv-ing* size, which is an amount of food. The serving size helps you to understand the amount of food you're eating.
- ❖ In this example, the serving size is *7 crackers*.
- ❖ The label also tells you the number of servings of the particular food. In this label, there are *8 servings total*.

## 2. The Percent Daily Value (%DV)

- ❖ This part of the label shows recommended dietary advice for all Americans. It will be the same on all nutrition labels.
- ❖ The %DV, which means *Percent Daily Value*, tells you if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient. It is based on a 2,000 calorie/day diet.
- ❖ If you want to eat less of a nutrient, choose foods with a lower %DV (5%DV or less), and if you're looking to eat more of a nutrient, choose foods with a higher %DV (those with 20% or more). In this example, the *total fat (3g) in one serving is 5%DV of total fat intake*.

## 3. Calories

- ❖ Calories are a measure of the energy you get from food. They are important because eating more calories than your body uses can lead to weight gain.
- ❖ Calories are for *one serving*. In this example, *one serving (7 crackers)* has *120 calories*.
- ❖ Another important part of this section is the number of calories that come from fat. For this number, lower is better because it's a good idea to limit fat intake. Here, *25 calories* are from fat. *A rule to follow:* no more than 30% of your calories should come from fat.

## 4. Nutrients

### ❖ Total Fat

- Your body needs fat, but eating too much fat may put you at risk for heart (*cardiovascular*) disease.
- *Total fat* is the number of fat *grams* in *one serving* of food. This example has *3g of total fat in one serving*—that's 5% of your daily amount. Fat intake should be limited to less than 56 grams per day on a 2,000-calorie diet.
- *Saturated* and *trans* fats are "bad" fats (found in many "fast foods") that can lead to heart disease. This example has *0g per serving* for both *saturated* and *trans* fats.
- *Polyunsaturated* and *monounsaturated* fats are "better" fats (found in olive oil, avocados, and most nuts) and may be healthier for your heart. This example has *1.5g of polyunsaturated* fat and *0.5g of monounsaturated* fat.

### ❖ Cholesterol

- The cholesterol in a serving is expressed in *milligrams*.
- Eating foods high in cholesterol can raise your risk for heart disease.
- In this example, *one serving* has *0mg of cholesterol*. In a 2,000-calorie diet, limit your cholesterol to 300 mg/day.

### ❖ Sodium (Salt)

- This number measures the *milligrams* of salt in *one serving*.
- Eating too much sodium can lead to *hypertension*—a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Certain people with diseases like *hypertension* or *diabetes* should limit sodium from their diets.
- In this example, *one serving* has *85mg of sodium*—that's 6% of the total daily amount in a 2,000-calorie diet.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size:	7 Crackers (29g)
Servings Per Container:	About 8
Amount Per Serving:	
Calories:	120
Calories from Fat:	25
% Daily Value	
Total Fat	3g 5%
Saturated Fat	0g 0%
Trans Fat	0g
Polyunsaturated Fat	1.5g
Monounsaturated Fat	0.5g
Cholesterol	0mg 0%
Sodium	85mg 6%
Total Carbohydrate	21g 7%
Dietary Fiber	3g 13%
Sugars	0g
Protein	3g
Vitamin A	0%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	0%
Iron	6%

\*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

### ❖ Total Carbohydrates

- This number tells you how many *grams of carbohydrates* are in *one serving*.
- Eating too many simple carbohydrates (*sugars*) can lead to obesity or diabetes—both are risk factors for heart disease.
- In this example, *one serving* has *21g of total carbohydrates*, including *3g of dietary fiber* and *0g of sugar*—that's 7% of the total daily amount in a 2,000-calorie diet.

## 5. Get Enough of These

- ❖ Most Americans don't get enough *dietary fiber*, *vitamin A*, *vitamin C*, *iron*, and *calcium* in their diets. Eating enough of these nutrients can help reduce your risk for certain diseases.

**REFERENCES:** American Diabetes Association. Taking a closer look at the label. Available at: <http://www.diabetes.org/nutrition-and-recipes/nutrition/foodlabel/closer-look.jsp>. • American Heart Association. Reading food labels. Available at: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3046050>. • US Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. How to understand and use the nutrition facts label. Available at: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>. Updated November 2004. • Figuring out food labels. Kids Health. Available at [http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay\\_healthy/food/labels.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/labels.html). • Nutrition labels. Nutrio.com, Inc. Available at: <http://www.nutrio.com/content?page=44&cat=0>. All websites accessed July 16, 2007.

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