

Wellness: Nutrition facts

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If you're trying to plan healthy meals and snacks for yourself and your family, you already have all the information you need. Since 1994, [The Food and Drug Administration](#) has required "Nutrition Facts" labels to be placed on most food packaging.

At first glance the label might look confusing, but it is a great resource when trying to make healthy food choices.

Serving size and servings per container

It is important to know exactly what "one serving" is because all other information is based on it.

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For example, you might think a pre-packaged muffin would be one serving. But if the label lists the serving size as half a muffin, with 200 calories per serving you'd be eating a whopping 400 calories if you ate a whole muffin!

Nutrients

Nutrition Facts labels list certain key nutrients that have an effect on your health. They are separated into those you should limit and those you should get enough of.

Since Americans generally get enough or too much fat, cholesterol, sugar and sodium, you should try to limit the amount you get in a particular food. Since we generally don't get enough fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium or iron, you should choose foods higher in these.

Percentage of daily value

This number tells you how much of a specific nutrient you get from eating one serving. You can use the numbers to determine if a food has a little or a lot of the nutrients listed. Here's a quick rule of thumb.

If a food has: It is considered to be:

5% or less low in a nutrient

10% to 19% a good source of a nutrient

20% or more high in a nutrient

In this way you can use food labels to decide if a food is generally nutritious without having to keep track of percentages. When you choose a food that is high in the nutrients you should limit, like fat or sodium, you can balance that by choosing other foods that day that are low in these nutrients.

Create a well-balanced diet

Use Nutrition Facts labels to:

Control your portion sizes.

Limit fats, cholesterol, sugar and sodium.

Choose foods higher in fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron.

Make healthier food choices.

Compare similar foods.

It may seem complicated at first, but with a little practice, you'll be able to quickly see how to make good nutrition choices for yourself and family from the Nutrition Facts right at your fingertips.

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