THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION

How To Read A Food Label

A Simple Guide To Overcoming the Intimidation, Understanding the Basics, and Shopping with Confidence

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INTRODUCTION

How to Read a Food Label

Your relationship with food is very important. What you eat can help to give you energy, improve your immunity, and allow you to combat many diseases. But it can also do the opposite—leave you feeling weak and even cause disease.

One of the most important things you can do for your own nutrition is to know what you're eating, and by reading food labels, you really can determine exactly what you're putting into your body.

I know what you're thinking. Reading what's on the label... it can be a challenge, right? If you've ever found yourself standing in a crowded grocery aisle, trying to make sense of all of that information, and just doing your best to understand the importance of all of the ingredients, you've probably felt the pressure. You've sensed those irritated glares from impatient shoppers—standing behind you, just waiting to grab something from the shelf in front of you. But there you stood, immobilized, scratching your head in confusion, attempting to calculate all of those numbers and their percentages. It doesn't take long to realize that your quick shopping trip just turned into an overwhelming nightmare for everyone on aisle seven! I know you're wondering if it's really worth all of that trouble.

Facing the Facts

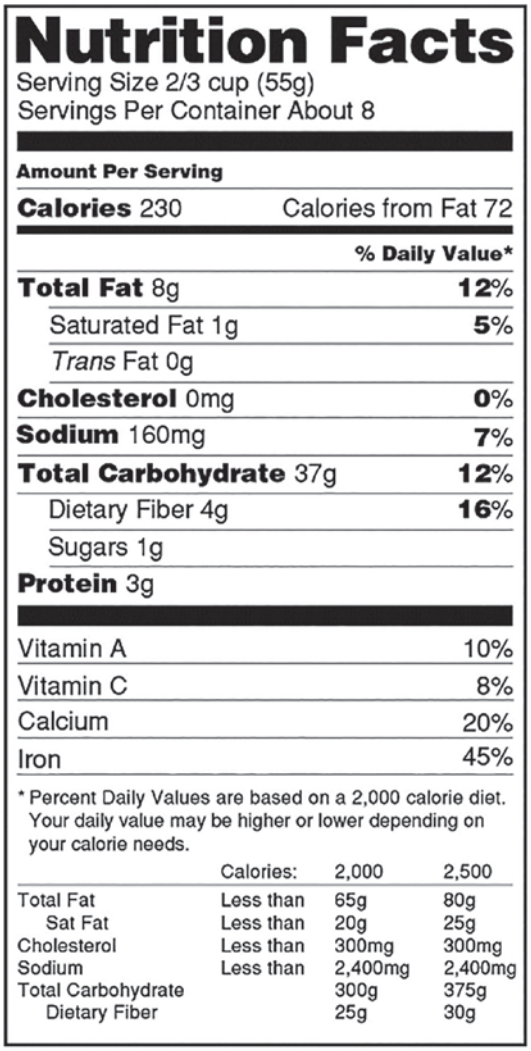
Reading a food label can certainly be a challenge for many, but you can expect a few changes in the near future that are supposed to make this a little easier. Did you know that the FDA just announced in May of 2016 that they were

updating the requirements for the Nutrition Facts label for packaged foods? Actually, some manufacturers have already implemented the new design, but for some products, the transition will be a gradual process. Large manufacturing companies are required to comply by July 26, 2018, and smaller companies (those bringing in less than $10 million in annual food sales) will have until July 26, 2019 (an additional year) to update their packaging.

The FDA made the decision for these new labeling requirements based on recent results from scientific research and other reports used to develop the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Scientists now recognize a direct link between declining dietary habits and a frightening increase in chronic diseases such as obesity and heart disease.[1] Honestly, it's no big surprise that most consumers have been consistently making poor food choices and exceeding what was once considered to be a recommended serving size on the package. But even those who have been trying to follow a healthy diet might be shocked to know that the Nutrition Facts label on that packaging they've been reading was more than 20 years old!

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the existing Nutrition Facts label and the new, redesigned version:

"OLD" Design



Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 2/3 cup (55g)
Servings Per Container About 8

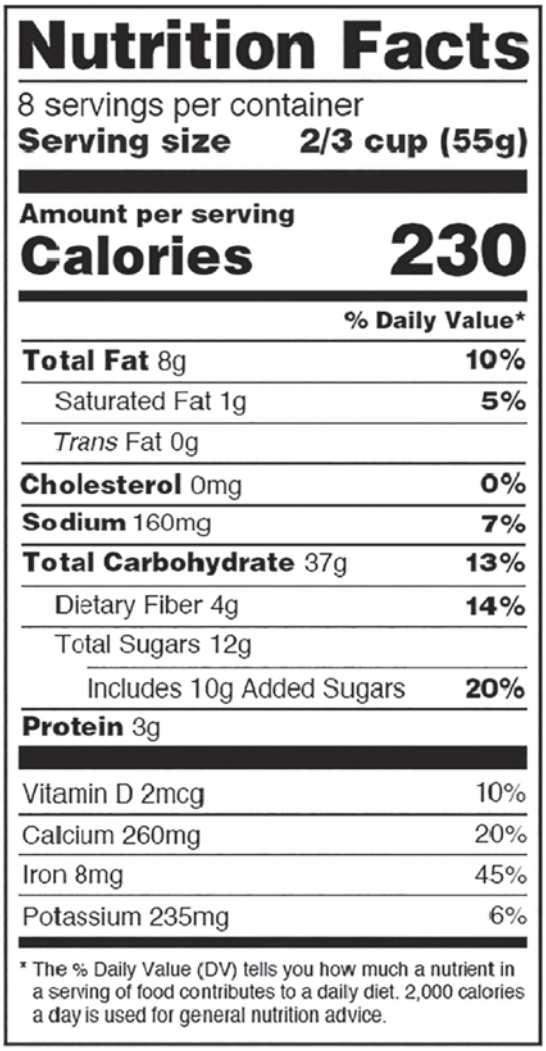
Amount Per Serving

Calories 230	Calories from Fat 72
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 8g	**12%**
Saturated Fat 1g	**5%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 160mg	**7%**
Total Carbohydrate 37g	**12%**
Dietary Fiber 4g	**16%**
Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A	10%
Vitamin C	8%
Calcium	20%
Iron	45%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily value 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
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

"NEW" Design



Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container
Serving size **2/3 cup (55g)**

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Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 160mg	**7%**
Total Carbohydrate 37g	**13%**
Dietary Fiber 4g	**14%**
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	**20%**
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

So let's have a closer look at some of the major changes that have been made.

Serving Size and Servings Per Container

You'll immediately notice that some things will be easier to read due to an increased type size and bold numbers for things such as: "Calories," "Servings per container," and the "Serving size." However, there is an important change that is much less obvious at first glance. Rather than showing what you should be eating, it is now required by law that serving and package sizes are based

on the amount of foods and beverages that are *actually consumed in one sitting*. So essentially, they've simply adjusted the serving size requirements to accommodate for the portion sizes that people are now typically eating.

For example, when you look at the revised label on a bottle of soda, the nutritional data will reflect that of a 12-oz. serving of soda, rather than the previous 8-oz. recommendation. In comparison, the reference amount for yogurt decreased from 8 ounces to 6 ounces. So does that mean that the FDA is suggesting that it's now "okay" to consume an extra 4 ounces, as the new indicated serving size? No. Does this mean that eating yogurt is better for you if you eat 2 ounces less? No. Remember, these new changes are supposed to illustrate a realistic guideline for how much a person *typically* eats, not how much a person should be eating. So what about healthy portion control, particularly for those who are already overeating at each meal? The FDA is leaving that up to the informed consumer to decide.

The "Daily Value" Footnote

Formerly indicated as: "*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet," the revised version will better explain what this means. It will now read: "*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes

to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice." The concept of the Daily Value remains the same; it's just going to be a bit easier to understand.

Labeling Requirements for Nutrients & Ingredients

What's In, and What's Out?

"Added Sugars"—They're mostly "IN."

Decreasing intake of added sugar will be a required emphasis, which is certainly a good thing. While some sugar can be part of a healthy diet (after all, fruits and vegetables contain natural sugar), we know that an excess of added sugar can lead to all sorts of problems. So by the FDA's definition, "added sugars includes sugars that are either added during the processing of foods, or are packaged as such, and include sugar (free, mono- and disaccharides), sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices that are in excess of what would be expected from the same volume of 100% fruit or vegetable juice of the same type. The definition excludes fruit or vegetable juice concentrated from 100% fruit juice that is sold to consumers (e.g. frozen 100% fruit juice concentrate), as well as some sugars found in fruit and vegetable juices, jellies, jams, preserves, and fruit spreads."[1] So while the "Total Sugars" label requirement must indicate how much sugar was "added," you may still be getting more of it than you realize. Even some of the healthier, naturally sweetened alternatives may indicate that the product contains "zero added sugars." So it's important to take into account the amount of sugar you're consuming, even when it comes from natural sources.

Vitamin D and Potassium—They're "IN." Nationwide surveys report that these two vital nutrients, important for bone health and blood pressure, are among those that most American's don't get enough of. So along with calcium and iron, the amounts of vitamin D and potassium will now be required on the label, which is great news.

Vitamins A and C—They're "OUT." While now considered to be "voluntary" rather than required on the food label, it's likely that you will no longer find information indicating the amounts of this "essential" duo in any packaged foods. The body is not able to produce Vitamins A and C, but they are easily obtained from natural food sources, particularly fruits and leafy green vegetables. So if these are "essential," what is the reasoning for changing the labeling requirements for manufacturing companies to be "voluntary"? The FDA states that since the early 1990's, ". . . Vitamins A and C deficiencies in the general population are rare."[1] But even while vitamin C deficiency status has improved, researchers agree that the current Recommended Daily Allowance (established for healthy Americans) is too low and doesn't apply to a large percentage of our population. Researchers agree that smokers (or those who use products containing nicotine), and low-income persons were among those at increased risk for deficiency.[2]

Trans Fat—It's "OUT," but it's still "IN." Trans fat is a bit tricky because it is commonly found in partially hydrogenated oils, but is also naturally present in food from some animals. In 2015, the FDA finally deemed PHOs (the *artificial* sources of trans fat) to be unsafe. Of course there are also loopholes that allow manufacturers to use *some* oils approved as food additives, and that also allow them the ability to petition the FDA for certain uses of PHOs,[1] no big surprise there. But since trans fat from natural sources can be present, it will remain a requirement on the label. So whether you're reading the label on a

bottle of cooking oil or a bottle of salad dressing, be sure to look for an option that does not contain partially hydrogenated oil.

Sodium Reduction Recommendations—Status is "PENDING." While the FDA is in the process of developing requirement targets for reducing the amount of sodium in processed and prepared foods, they are doing so voluntarily. So there will be no compliance date. They are recommending certain timeframes (short-term of 2 years and long-term of 10 years) for companies to comply once the details have been finalized.[1] So without further distinction, the FDA is leaving it up to the consumer to decide if they want to reduce their dietary intake of sodium based on current recommendations.

The bottom line is this: the purpose for the label redesign is to allow consumers to make better-informed food choices more easily (with the goal of reducing our risk for disease)[3], which sounds great, right? But, as with every decision you make regarding your overall health, you have to be well informed of all of the details. While it seems that these "improvements" were created with the best of intentions, it will be interesting to see future studies that reflect factual, positive results for those consumers who follow a healthy diet plan according to these new FDA guidelines. So will all of these labeling improvements allow you shop for healthy foods more efficiently, and with less confusion? The FDA is leaving that up to the consumer to decide.

But I want you to understand that shopping for healthy food doesn't have to be a frustrating experience. Because once you know the basics you'll be strolling the aisles, reading labels, and choosing the right foods with CONFIDENCE.

Just follow these simple guidelines, and as you begin to limit your foods that have labels on them in favor of whole foods, *you'll begin to see your health improve dramatically.*

Understanding Ingredients

It's important to be able to identify all of the ingredients that are included in the foods you eat. Don't be deceived by the pretty packages—some may say that they're "healthy" on the front of the package, but when you check the ingredients list, they may actually contain a host of artificial additives and preservatives.

Foods Without Labels

When it comes to nutrition, the best thing you can do is look for foods that don't require labels. Most of these founds are found around the outer edges of the grocery store and not in the inner aisles. These are foods such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meats. The less processed your food is, the healthier it will be.

Is This a REAL Food or a Total FAKE?

By "real food" we mean something that is not that far away from its original form. This can mean that it has only a couple of ingredients in it, or that it hasn't been heavily processed. An example would be "real" butter versus some "butter-like spread." One (the butter) has two ingredients in it (cream and salt), and the other has a lot of ingredients, some of which are heavily processed (like soy oil).

"How long is the list of Ingredients? When reading a label to determine whether or not a food is real, first ask yourself, "How Long is the List of Ingredients?" The length of the ingredient list should give you a clue! The more ingredients and the larger the chemical names, the more "fake" this food is, and the less you want to eat it if you want to be healthy.

Some GOOD Foods Can Have Labels, Too!

Other packaged foods have labels but are *also* close to their natural state, such as:

- Full-fat milk, cheese, butter, plain full-fat yogurt
- Real eggs
- Freshly baked, whole grain bread
- Whole grain cereals (not too much, though!)
- Natural peanut, almond, and other types of nut butters
- Hummus spread
- Sauerkraut

Ingredients that are chemically processed are not natural, and they are generally not good for your body. A rule of thumb to follow is that, if you can't pronounce the ingredient, you probably shouldn't eat it.

Watch for certain words or phrases that can trick you:

- **Imitation**—you should just eat the real thing
- **Natural**—just because it doesn't have synthetics in it doesn't make it healthy
- **Spread**—for example, a butter-like spread, rather than healthier, real butter
- **Reduced/Less**—doesn't mean it's that much less than the original
- **Light/Lite**—low-fat food is highly processed. Get the real, full-fat thing instead
- **Anything that doesn't use it's real name**—for example, "creamer" vs. actual cream
- **Made with Real Fruit**—doesn't say how much, and it's typically so little as to be next to none

Most of all use some common sense. A breakfast cereal with sugar will never be your best choice, even if it says "heart healthy" on the label.

"What's first on the list?". The order of things makes a difference.

Ingredients in products are listed in order from their greatest amount to least amount in the package. Paying attention to the list of ingredients, and the order in which they're listed, can definitely be very helpful for determining whether or not a food is something you want to eat.

Some ingredients you might want to *avoid* include:

- Corn syrup (highly processed sugar)
- Fructose, high fructose corn syrup, crystallized fructose, or anything with fructose in it

- Sugar, dextrose, sucrose, maltose, glucose (there's a complete list below)
- Hydrogenated oils
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Artificial coloring
- Artificial sweeteners (sucralose, aspartame, saccharin)

Other names for sugar that's often hidden in the ingredient list are:

Cane juice, Dehydrated cane juice, Cane juice solids, Cane juice crystals, Dextrin, Maltodextrin, Dextran, Barley malt, Beet sugar, Corn syrup, Corn syrup solids, Caramel, Buttered syrup, Carob syrup, Brown sugar, Date sugar, Malt syrup, Diatase, Diatastic malt, Fruit juice, Fruit juice concentrate, Dehydrated fruit juice, Fruit juice crystals, Golden syrup, Turbinado, Sorghum syrup, Refiner's syrup, Ethyl maltol, Maple syrup, and Yellow sugar.

Be Smart About Serving Size

Begin by looking at the serving size on the label. It's important to have an accurate idea of how much you're actually eating. For example, if you have a can of soup and the label says it's 2 servings, that means that the amount per serving listed on the label would be doubled if you ate the whole can.

Even though the serving size amounts listed on many labels have improved recently, you should still be cautious. Many similar (even identical) items may not always share the same serving size on the label.

Do Calories Count?

When it comes to calories, do your best at reading the label, but understand that it may not be fully accurate. The FDA allows a 20% margin of error regarding calories on a label. A recent study done by Tufts University found

that packaged foods could contain 8% more calories than stated on the label, while restaurant foods had nearly 20% more calories than they said.[4]

Even still, calories are a little farther down on the list of importance. "How can that be?", you ask. "I've always counted calories!" While calories ARE important, and you can definitely gain weight if you eat too many of them, the old model of counting calories to lose weight is being shifted to counting carbohydrate grams.

While we used to think it was all about the math, we forgot a few things. The old calorie-counting model that said a gram of carbs had 4 calories and a gram of fat had 9 calories, but it conveniently forgot that the gram of carbohydrate came along with its corresponding insulin reaction. *And the moment insulin is in your blood stream you cannot burn fat.* That's actually a normal reaction, but in our commitment to the high-carb diet of the Food Pyramid, we then had insulin in our system nearly all the time, and our waistlines increased as well. On the other hand, that gram of fat—it made you feel full, and that's what research showed as well. So for your weight and health, it's easier and more effective to count carbohydrates and eat normal amounts of fats, than it is to eat low calorie.

But it's still good to know about the amount of calories in the foods you eat, because this shows how much energy it takes to break down the food. The higher the calories, the longer it will take to break it down.

Your metabolism is the measure of how much energy you burn over a period of time. While we often think of exercising as burning calories, the effect of exercise is small compared to the total calories you burn.

When your heart beats, you breathe in and out, your body breaks down nutrients and makes new blood cells, and you're burning calories. How many calories you individually need, though, varies, which is why you can't follow the generalization of the average person needing 2000 calories per day. It just depends on your age, how active you are, how healthy you are…. a lot of

variables! So while calories are important, they are only one part of the overall picture.

The Facts About Fats

Food labels will also give you information about fats. In the past, health practitioners told patients to avoid fat altogether. But it turns out that modern science doesn't support that type of diet. You actually need fats, saturated and unsaturated, just like you need other molecules in your food.

Here are a couple of little facts about fats you might not know—first, all fats are a mix of saturated and unsaturated. There's no such thing as a fat being purely one or the other. Second, reconsider the research that convinced you that saturated fat causes heart disease—that's being proven wrong even as you read this. Not only that, it has been shown to be wrong in research dating back *over 15 years!*

It turns out that what causes heart disease are two basic things—insulin, (which causes you to lay down the small, dense LDL that makes plaque), and processed vegetable oils, (like corn, soy, safflower, and vegetable). Those oils are high in omega-6's, which, if you get too many of them, cause inflammation. And if you eat out a lot, or use those oils at home, you definitely get too many of them.

GOOD FATS	BAD FATS
☑ Avocados	☒ Corn & Vegetable oil
☑ Coconut and EV Olive oil	☒ Margarine
☑ Meats & Dairy	☒ Packaged Desserts; (cookies, pastries, cakes)
☑ Eggs	☒ Packaged Snacks; (chips, crackers, popcorn)
☑ Nuts & Seeds	☒ Deep Fried Foods; (fries, donuts, chicken nuggets)

They also contribute to oxidized LDL, which causes plaque, as well.

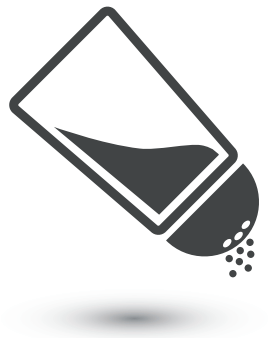
The most dangerous types of fat, though, are trans fats and hydrogenated fats. They have been shown to lower your HDL (the good kind) and increase your small, dense LDL (the bad kind). They also increase triglycerides, inflammation, and heart disease. The National Academy of Sciences says, "There is no safe level of trans fat consumption. There is no adequate level, recommended daily amount or tolerable upper limit for trans fats. This is because any incremental increase in trans fat intake increases the risk of coronary heart disease."[5]

The reason they are so dangerous is because, to your body, they "look" like saturated fats, and you use saturated fats for a lot of important things, like protection in cell membranes and to transport minerals around your body. A trans fat, or hydrogenated fat, "looks" chemically close enough that your body can't see the difference, and then puts that bad fat in all the places it would use a good saturated fat. This leads to damage all over your body—you can't detect it, but it can cause some serious health issues. They are so dangerous that trans fats have been *banned* in some countries.

You find these trans fats and hydrogenated fats in processed foods like inexpensive supermarket cakes and icings, cookies, and chips. It's also often used to fry foods in restaurants, and in refrigerated dough, like cookie dough, cinnamon rolls, biscuits, piecrusts and pizza crusts, as well as non-dairy creamers, and stick margarine. When you look at a label, watch for words like "partially hydrogenated." Even if the label says "trans fat-free", it might not be—if it has less than 0.5 g per serving, it can still get labeled "trans fat-free."

Another reason to stay away from processed, fake food!

Sodium Safety



Sodium is the fancy, scientific term for salt. If you have normal blood pressure you probably don't pay too much attention to salt. But if you're suffering from high blood pressure, you can't ignore it! Sodium found in processed foods is ABSOLUTELY one of the biggest driving factors of high blood pressure. High sodium is often found in these more processed or "fake" foods because most big companies process the food's true flavor out, and they also tend to add an excessive amount of salt back in to make it taste better. If you're eating a more processed food, then you'll want to look for labels that have low amounts of sodium or are even free from it. Some foods are labeled as "low sodium", but you still need to look at the label and see where it fits in with your needs.

A Carb is A Carb

Fiber Facts

When it comes to carbohydrates, some are better for you than others. Let's be clear—you need carbohydrates to have energy and to be healthy. Any diet that tells you to eliminate them completely is unhealthy.

A food label will break down carbohydrates into two categories—fiber and sugars. While you're going to rein in the overall carbohydrate count (and the sugar count that's included), pay attention to fiber as well, as many people don't have enough of this nutrient in their diets. You want to look for foods that are high in fiber, as we're supposed to have 28 grams per day. The best way to get this is by eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

Fiber can help you to lower your cholesterol and helps your digestive system to be more regular, and most importantly, it helps you feel full.

Total Sugar

Sugar (and the whole category of carbohydrates) is also found in high amounts in a lot of processed foods, since it also makes the food taste better. The problem is, the insulin released in response to it causes an increase in fluids in your body and drives high blood pressure as well. On the "old label", the sugar part of the label is included in the "Carbohydrate" count, and on the new label, total sugars and total added sugars is now included, so while you can look these values individually, the Total Carbohydrate listing is the most complete.

The Purpose of Protein

Your body must have protein to build structures. Most of the structures inside you consist of protein, and in order to have the building blocks to repair cells and develop muscles, you'll need to eat food that has this important molecule.

A food label will tell you the number of grams of protein in your food. You'll want to look for foods that are high in protein. Foods that have a lot of protein include nuts, meats, whole grain foods, and dairy products.

Fortifying Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamins and minerals—you know you need them, but are you getting them each day? If you're like most people who are not following a healthy, well-balanced diet, it's probably safe to assume that you're not getting a sufficient

amount of the nutrients needed for optimal health. The best way to get your vitamins and minerals is through the food you eat—where you'll find these nutrients in a natural state, one that's easy for your body to absorb.

It's pretty easy to conclude that fresh, whole foods (in their natural state) are obviously excellent sources of the vitamins and minerals you're looking for. But it's also pretty easy to make good choices when it comes to those packaged, "good-for-you" foods, too. All you have to do is check the labels. You'll want to look for foods that are high in vitamins and minerals—such as calcium, potassium, magnesium, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin A, and beta-carotene.

If you're uncertain of your intake, or feel like you're still not getting a sufficient amount from dietary sources, it's always a good idea to talk to your health care professional. He or she can advise you about adding the proper amounts of any dietary supplements to your daily health routine, based on your individual nutritional needs.

Making Time to Make Good Choices

When you're shopping, using food labels can help you to make good choices. And when you're new at reading food labels, it can seem overwhelming. But the more you do it, the easier it becomes. You'll also have your "go-to" foods that you can just pick up without revisiting the label every time.

Keep it Simple, and Cover the Basics

Look for "real" foods, ideally without labels. If you have to go for any packaged foods, look for those that are high in nutrition, and with few ingredients listed on the label. Choose those that have little or no chemical additives or preservatives, no trans and/or hydrogenated fats, and no processed sugars.

Plan Ahead

When you're paying more attention plan to spend some extra time at the grocery store when you're paying more attention to food labels. Take notice of what nutrients you're looking to limit and for those that you need to add to your diet.

Be Mindful of Deceptive Packaging

Don't decide based on what's on the front of the package without first checking the ingredients list to see what's actually inside.

Before You Shop, Make a List

Make a list of what you need to get, then, as you're shopping, make a list of additional foods that you'd like to incorporate into your diet. You may also want to make a list of foods you'd like to avoid. Perhaps something you've always loved has way more sugar or carbs than you can "afford." Spend some time looking for a substitute that's on the healthier side.

Reading food labels while you're shopping doesn't have to be an overwhelming experience—just plan ahead to make healthy choices! This will help you to prevent disease, have more energy, and even help you to shrink your waistline.

Resources

1. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (All information contained—both text and graphics—is public domain. All updated information can be obtained at www.fda.gov).
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