

Label Reading Tips

Reading nutrition labels can look difficult, but it doesn't have to be!

A key component of meal planning is knowing how to read a nutrition label. Labels provide a lot of useful information about the nutritional value of a particular food, but they can be difficult to understand if you don't know what to look for. Being able to read a nutrition label will help you to get the most out of your meals, and can help make meal planning a lot easier!

Take a look at the serving size located at the top of the label. Often times, packages of food contain more than one serving. Nutrition labels generally reference a smaller, specified amount of what's in the product. When you look at items like the amount of calories and sugar that is listed on a label, it is in reference to the recommended serving size.

Take a look at how many calories are in one serving. Calories are the amount of energy that you will consume from one given serving. The average woman should consume around 2000 calories per day, and the average man should consume 2500. Keep a food journal if you find it difficult to manage balancing your diet! If you are trying to lose weight, women should try to consume 1500 cal. to lose one pound a week, and men 2000 cal.

% Daily value (DV) tells you how much of a particular nutrient is in one serving of food. 5% DV is considered very little, while anything 15% or above is considered a lot. These values are important in determining how nutritious a particular food is. Try to stay away from items with a high percentage of trans-fat, sodium and sugar content, and opt for food with more dietary fibre, protein and vitamins.

They are often seen as negative, but carbohydrates or carbs are very important to a well-balanced diet. Carbs are an important source of energy, and can help us to feel fuller for longer. The most important thing to keep in mind are which types of carbs you're consuming. Complex carbs which are found in vegetables, fruits, beans and whole grains help you to feel full and are more beneficial for your body. Complex carbs are great because the fibre that is found in them helps your body to break food down more slowly, which in turn controls spikes in blood sugar levels. Another way to maximize your health is to look at the ratios of carbohydrates to fibre in a meal. Researchers found that the most optimal foods have a 10:1 ratio (for every 10 grams of carbohydrates, there is at least 1 gram of fibre). Even amongst whole grains and foods that have the label of "healthy", there can still be discrepancies when it comes to quality. This ratio ensures that the quality of carbohydrates which you are consuming gives you the biggest health benefit.

Sugar by any other name is still sugar. Be careful of tricky names for sugar on packaging that can sometimes make it difficult to identify. Does sucrose, high-fructose corn syrup and dextrose



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sound familiar? These are all different names for sugar! Although they each differ slightly, it's important not to be fooled into thinking that something is sugar-free, simply because of the name. If something in your ingredients list ends in "-ose," be aware that it's a sugar. Moderation is the key, and consuming small amounts of sugar in your day won't hurt you. Women should consume no more than 24 grams of sugar in a day, and men should consume no more than 36 grams. A great way to manage your sugar consumption is to apply the 1:1 ratio (for every gram of sugar, there should be 1 gram of fibre). This ratio is ideal because it allows the fibre to slow down the absorption of sugar in the blood, so that it can be used for energy rather than fat. A low, balanced intake of sugar helps us to reduce the amount of excess sugar buildup in the body, and can help you to manage your weight more effectively.

Ingredient lists are important! Keep in mind the order of the nutrients and ingredients in these lists. Labels list ingredients in order of the highest to lowest content in a package. If you are trying to reduce or increase your intake of specific ingredients, consider its position on the ingredients list.



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