

READING NUTRITION LABELS

AT A GLANCE

Looking at any food label there are categories in bold. We see **servings size, calories, total fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrate** and **protein**.

SERVINGS PER CONTAINER

How much food a package contains can help us determine how much nutrition is in the food. Often times we eat more or less than the **servings size** and need to multiply or divide a nutrient (carb, protein, fat) by how many servings we consume from the total servings available.

The **servings size** is the amount a person typically eats or drinks, not necessarily a guide to how much you should be eating or drinking.

CALORIES

Calories in a food represent how much energy will be provided when eating that food. It is important to eat when hungry and to be sure you get enough calories to fuel your daily physical and mental needs.

TOTAL FAT

Consuming fat is essential for our bodies to thrive. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are especially healthful, assisting with regulating cholesterol. Consuming enough polyunsaturated fats can reduce risk of heart disease and stroke. On the flip side, consuming excess saturated fat on a regular basis could put us at risk of developing heart disease.

Sample Label for Frozen Lasagna

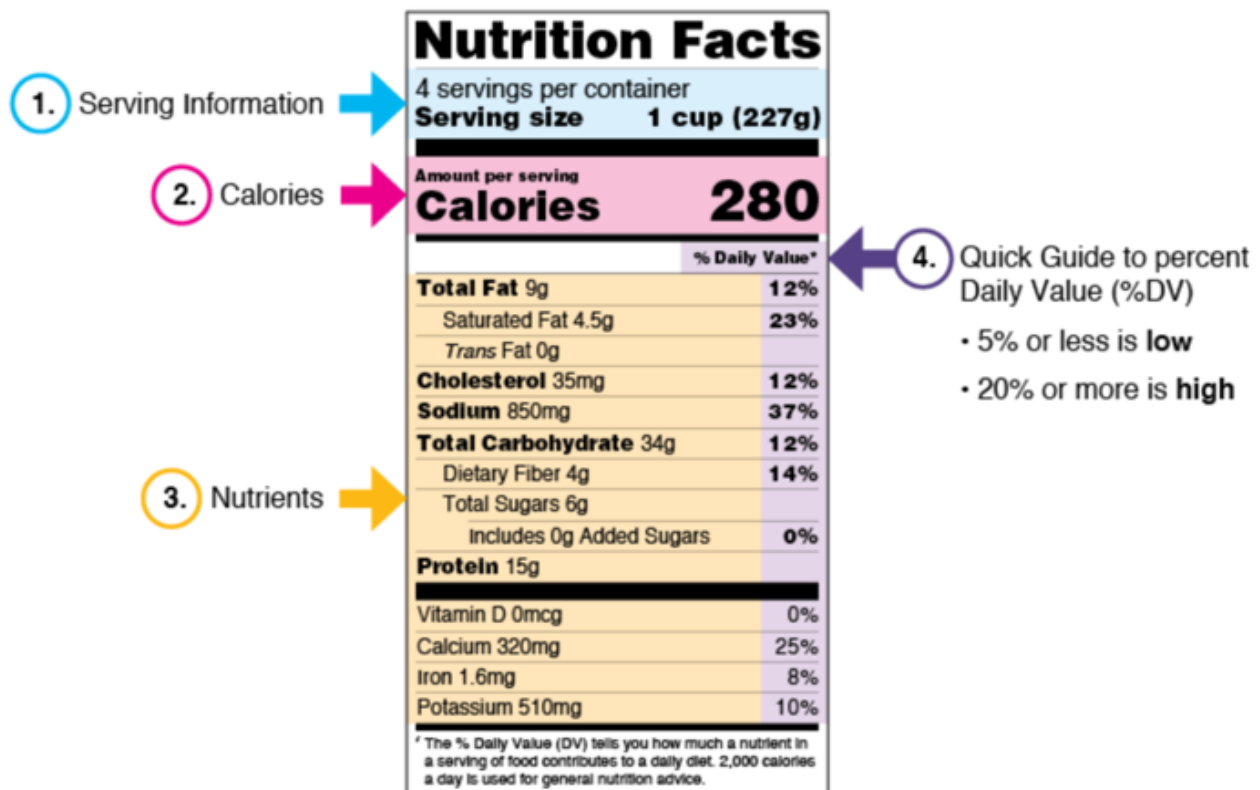


FIGURE 1.

SOURCE: FDA.GOV

CHOLESTEROL

We get cholesterol in one of two ways, we either get the right amount because our body makes cholesterol, or we eat animal-based foods that contribute to our daily cholesterol.

It is important to notice how much cholesterol a food contains as the daily recommendation is 180 mg of cholesterol per day or less. For reference, two large eggs would typically be around 370 mg, which exceeds the daily limit for cholesterol.

Consuming cholesterol in excess can lead to heart disease and other complications.

TOTAL CARBOHYDRATE

It is important to get enough carbohydrates each day. Carbohydrates are our body's preferred source of fuel and it is what the body uses up first when we do any sort of physical activity such as walking, weight training, or playing sports.

Carbohydrates on a nutrition label include sugar, fiber and starch.

Carbohydrates should be what most individuals consume the most of, typically 45-65% of total daily calories should come from carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables and beans.

SODIUM

Getting the right amount of sodium is important for athletes and anyone using excessive amounts of energy or sweating a lot. Getting too much sodium, can be damaging to our health, leading to high blood pressure and contributing to heart disease.

The recommended amount is equal to or less than 2,300 mg per day which is found in about 1 teaspoon of table salt.

Pre-made, packaged foods are typically where we get most of our daily sodium intake.

PROTEIN

Protein is needed to keep us full, recover from illness, and rebuild muscle. It is important to get enough protein each day.

However, often it is assumed we need a lot more protein each day than our body actually needs. As with other nutrients, getting excess protein is not ideal. Typically, a teenage female needs 46 grams of protein, and a teenage male needs 52 grams of protein.

% Daily Value

The % Daily Value is based on the Recommended Daily Value. Recommended Daily Value is determined by evidence-based nutrition research and shows us how much of nutrient we need to consume.

For example, teens need 25 mcg (micrograms) of Vitamin D each day.

The nutrition label in Figure 1. shows 0% vitamin D, which means if eating that dish, then you would still want to consume 100% of your recommended vitamin D, 25 mcg, from other sources.