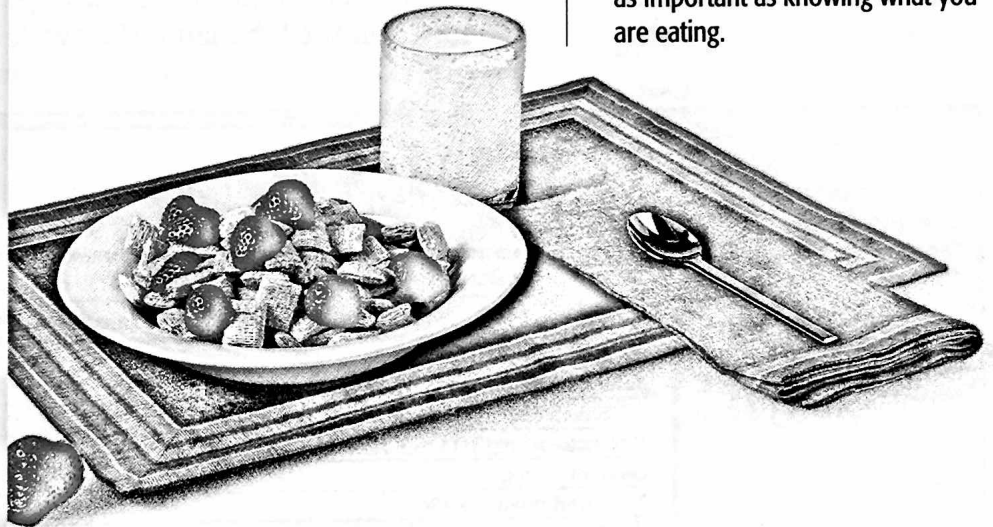
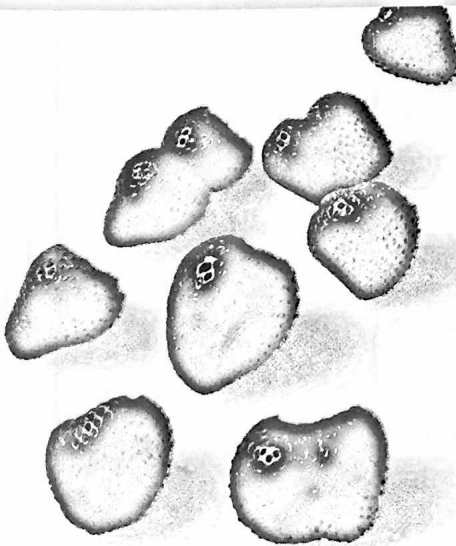


Being a Smart Food Consumer

The Food Guide Pyramid is one way of evaluating the nutritional contribution of a food or several foods to your overall eating pattern. This task becomes more challenging when you shop for prepared and packaged foods.

To help food shoppers, all food products now carry a standardized Nutrition Facts panel.



HEALTH TERMS

food additives
enriched food
fortification
unit pricing

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- The Nutrition Facts panel found on almost all packaged food products can help you judge whether a prepared or packaged food product meets your nutritional needs.
- Part of health literacy is learning to understand and judge claims made on food packages.
- Knowing what you are buying is as important as knowing what you are eating.

Nutrition Label Basics

The Nutrition Facts panel on food labels indicates the nutrient and calorie content of foods. This information helps you find good sources of nutrients, compare nutrients and calories among similar products, and choose foods that meet special dietary needs. Specifically, each label contains:

- serving size;
- servings per container;
- calories per serving and calories per serving from fat;
- grams of total fat, saturated fat, total carbohydrate, fiber, sugars, protein, and milligrams of cholesterol and sodium per serving;
- percentage of the Daily Value (DV) the product supplies of the above nutrients (except sugars and protein), plus some important minerals and vitamins in one serving.

Some nutrient labels have two lists. If a food is eaten with another food—for example, cereal with milk—nutritional information is given for the product alone and with the other food.

Foods that do not need to carry the Nutrition Facts panel include:

- food served in restaurants;
- plain coffee and tea;
- some spices and other foods that contain no nutrients;
- fresh meat, poultry, and fish;
- fresh fruits and vegetables;
- food produced by very small companies or offered in very small packages.

Ingredients List

Almost all food labels must have an ingredient list. Labels list ingredients by weight in descending order. The ingredient in greatest amount is listed first. Food labels with several similar ingredients may be confusing. For example, when three sweeteners—corn syrup, sugar, and honey—are used in the same product, each is listed separately and lower on the list than if they were listed totally as one ingredient.

▼ **The Nutrition Facts on the food label provide easy-to-read nutrition information “at the source.”**

ACTIVITY *How many calories from fat are contained in this product?*

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size ½ cup (114g)

Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

| Calories 90 | | Calories from Fat 30 | |
|-------------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| | | % Daily Value* | |
| Total Fat 3g | | | 5% |
| Saturated Fat 0g | | | 0% |
| Cholesterol 0mg | | | 0% |
| Sodium 300mg | | | 13% |
| Total Carbohydrate 13g | | | 4% |
| Dietary Fiber 3g | | | 12% |
| Sugars 3g | | | |
| Protein 3g | | | |
| Potassium | 0% | Thiamin | 0% |
| Vitamin A | 80% | Riboflavin | 0% |
| Vitamin C | 60% | Niacin | 0% |
| Calcium | 4% | Vitamin B 6 | 0% |
| Iron | 4% | Folate | 0% |
| Vitamin D | 0% | Phosphorus | 0% |

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values 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 |
| Potassium | | 3,500mg | 3,500mg |
| Total Carbohydrate | | 300g | 375g |
| Dietary Fiber | | 25g | 30g |

Nutrition Facts title signals that the label contains the new required information.

Serving sizes are more consistent across product lines and reflect the amounts people actually eat.

List of nutrients covers those most important to the health of today's consumers.

Daily Values are based on a daily diet of 2,000 and 2,500 calories.

Label shows calories per gram of fat, carbohydrates, and protein.

Calories from fat help consumers meet dietary guidelines that recommend people get no more than 30 percent of their calories from fat.

% Daily Value shows how a food fits into the overall daily diet.

FOOD ADDITIVES

Additives must be listed on food labels. **Food additives** are *substances added to food intentionally to produce a desired effect*. They are used to:

- add nutrients,
- lengthen storage life and keep it safe to eat,
- give flavor or color,
- maintain texture,
- control food's acidity,
- help age foods, such as cheese.

Foods can also be enriched or fortified to improve nutrient value. An **enriched food** is *a food in which nutrients that were lost in processing have been added back*. Breads, pastas, and rice made of refined grains are enriched with B vitamins and iron. **Fortification** is *the addition of nutrients that are not naturally present*. Because vitamin D helps deposit calcium in bones, milk is fortified with vitamin D.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the USDA regulate most foods that cross state lines. This includes foods with additives. If food manufacturers want to use regulated additives in their products, they must prove to the appropriate government agency that the additives are safe in the amounts used.

Some additives, such as sugar and salt, are termed *generally recognized as safe (GRAS)*. Because they have been used safely for years, these 700 or so additives can be used without permission.

SUGAR AND FAT SUBSTITUTES

The food industry has responded to many consumer concerns about nutrition. In many cases, the industry has been very creative in substituting ingredients that lower either the caloric count or the fat content.

Fructose, natural fruit sugar, is used as a sugar substitute. Because it is sweeter than table sugar, less is needed, so it supplies fewer calories. A noncaloric sweetener, *aspartame*, is commonly added to soft drinks and frozen desserts and is considered safe for most people when used in moderation. You can also buy aspartame in powdered form.

In response to the public's recent concern about fat, the food industry has begun developing fat substitutes. They have the potential for widespread use in processed foods, fried foods, and home cooking.

Food Product Label Claims

The food labeling regulations permit labels of certain foods to claim possible benefits in combating a disease or condition. For example, labels on products that are high in calcium can claim to be a possible help in preventing osteoporosis. Labels on foods high in fiber, low in fat, or high in vitamins A and C can claim they "may help" to lessen the risk of cancer.



▲ If you see the word "organic" on a label, it means the food product was made from foods grown without pesticides or synthetic fertilizers.



Sensitive to Additives?

Food manufacturers in the United States use almost 3,000 additives in their products, and all of them have been approved as safe by the government. However, a small percentage of people have reactions to colorings, flavorings, and preservatives in foods. Learning which ones they are sensitive to can sometimes mean the difference between feeling fit and having unpleasant reactions. Monosodium glutamate, or MSG, for example, is a food additive safe for most people but may cause discomfort to others. In the case of sulfite sensitivity, the reaction can be life threatening.

Other terms that may appear on food product labels and their meanings are:

- **Healthy:** The food is low in fat and saturated fat and contains limited amounts of cholesterol and sodium—no more than 360 mg per serving. In addition, if it is a single-item food, it provides at least 10 percent of one or more of the following: Vitamin A or C, iron, calcium, protein, or fiber.
- **Light:** The calories have been reduced by at least a third, or the fat or sodium by at least half.
- **Less:** The food contains 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than a comparable food. Similarly, if a food label claims *more*, the food contains 10 percent more of a nutrient than the Daily Value for that food.
- **-free:** The product contains no amount, or only a slight amount, of fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugars, or calories.

- **Fresh:** The food is raw, unprocessed, contains no preservatives, and has never been frozen or heated.
- **Natural:** This term is reserved for meat and poultry only. According to the USDA, it means the food is minimally processed with no artificial or synthetic ingredients.

Open Dating

Many food products are open dated with a system that consumers can easily interpret. Look for these dates on labels:

- **Expiration Date**—last date you should use the product
- **Freshness Date**—last date a food is thought to be fresh
- **Pack Date**—the date on which the product was packaged
- **Sell Date**—Also known as the pull date, this term denotes the last date the product—for example, milk—should be sold. Note that you can store a product past its sell date.

Shelf Labeling

In recent years, stores have begun including vital information of their own to help shoppers. The best-known and perhaps most important information of this kind is **unit pricing**, a strategy for recognizing the relative cost of a product based on the cost of a standard unit, such as an ounce or gram. An 8-ounce can of corn that costs 88¢, for example, has a unit price of 11¢ per ounce. If a 12-ounce can of the same brand costs \$1.04, it would have a unit price of 8.7¢ per ounce. Buying the larger can would give you more corn for your money. The one caution is that, before buying a larger size of a product, it is wise to determine whether you can use the extra amount.

▼ **Unit pricing labels appear below most products on supermarket shelves. Note that this helpful pricing policy is not confined to food products but applies to health and beauty aids as well.**

ACTIVITY *What other factors do you consider in making a choice besides the price?*

