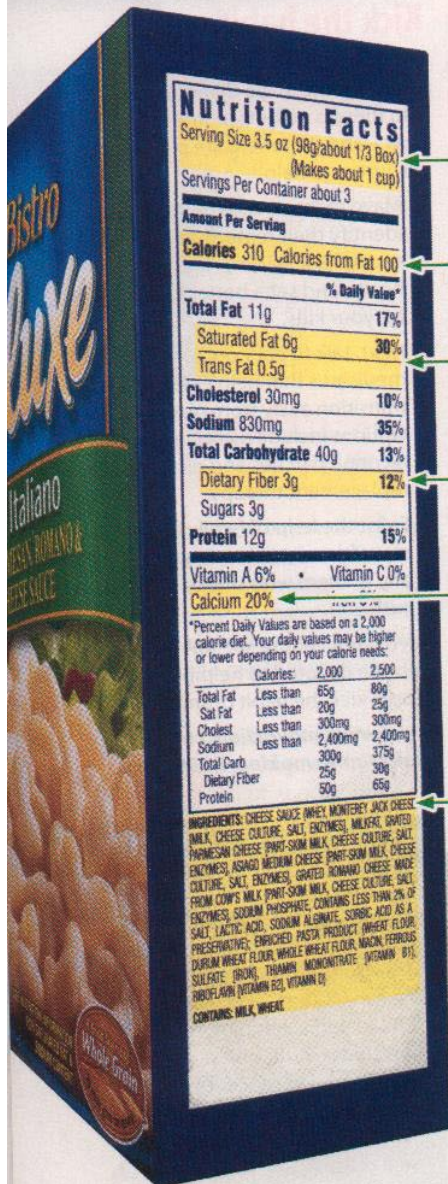


What to note on a nutrition label

BY MICHELLE GIBEAULT TRAUB

A nutrition label is an extremely helpful tool in making healthy food choices. Here are some tips to consider:



Serving size Get to know what standard servings, like a half or whole cup, actually look like by using a measuring cup.

Calories Most adult females need around 1600 calories per day, while adult males need approximately 2200 daily calories.

Saturated fat, trans fat Both types of fats can raise your risk for heart disease. Try to keep these numbers as low as possible.

Fiber Frequently overlooked, fiber is very important for weight and cholesterol management, digestive health, and blood sugar control. Aim for 25mg to 35 mg per day.

Calcium This is an important nutrient to track, as many people don't get the daily value of 1000 mg. To convert the percent DV for calcium to mg, simply add a zero (i.e., this product has 200 mg of calcium).

Ingredients Although listed last on a label, this should be the first place you look. In general, fewer ingredients are better. If a food has a long list of additives or reads like a chemistry textbook, you should probably steer clear. Ingredients are listed in order by weight (highest to lowest), so the first few ingredients are the most important. Try to limit your intake of ingredients that offer little nutritional value, such as:

- Partially hydrogenated oils that signal the presence of unhealthy, trans fats.
- High fructose corn syrup, which has been linked to an increased risk for obesity.
- Added sugars indicated by words that end in "ose" (fructose, dextrose, sucrose and the like).

Buyer beware

Food manufacturers have one major goal: selling their products. Keep that in mind when confronted by the following buzz words.

Fat free Although limiting saturated and trans fats is recommended, sometimes when fat is removed additional sugar is added. The resulting food may still be high in calories and low in nutrients.

No sugar added Just because a food doesn't have added sugar doesn't mean it's sugar-free.

Even healthy food choices can vary widely in their nutrient content, making label reading especially important. Keep a watchful eye when shopping for these popular staples.

Breakfast cereals Look for whole grain choices with at least 3 grams of fiber per serving and as little added sugar or sodium as possible.

Yogurt Although all types of yogurt contain around 15 grams of carbohydrate per cup from natural sugars (lactose), some yogurts contain an additional 30-plus grams of added sugar. Look for reduced sugar choices, or buy plain varieties and add your own fruit and sweetener.

Granola bars Some granola bars are loaded with sugar and oils. Look for whole oats or brown rice as the main ingredient, and choose all-natural options with at least 2 grams of fiber.

Customize your label

- To lose weight, focus on serving size and overall calories.
- To lower your cholesterol, hone in on lowering saturated fats and trans fats and increasing soluble fiber.
- To lower high blood pressure, look for lower sodium.
- To keep blood sugar under control, avoid added sugars and keep total carbohydrates in check.