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Nutrition Labels

Updated:

November 2011

IT'S YOUR HEALTH

Nutrition Labels

THE ISSUE

Healthy eating can help you improve your health and reduce your risk of many **chronic diseases**. Food labels found on most pre-packaged food and drinks give important information to help you make healthy choices.

READING FOOD LABELS

A food label contains this information:

- a **Nutrition Facts table** (mandatory)
- an **ingredient list** (mandatory)
- **nutrition claims** (optional)

Yogurt

Nutrition Facts			
Per 3/4 cup (175 g)			
Amount	% Daily Value		
Calories 160			
Fat 2.5 g			4 %
Saturated 1.5 g			8 %
+ Trans 0 g			
Cholesterol 10 mg			
Sodium 75 mg			3 %
Carbohydrate 25 g			8 %
Fibre 0 g			0 %
Sugars 24 g			
Protein 8 g			
Vitamin A	2 %	Vitamin C	0 %
Calcium	17 %	Iron	0 %

The Nutrition Facts table shows the number of calories and the amounts of 13 core nutrients that are in a specific **portion** of food.

- The specific amount of food in the Nutrition Facts table is shown by a phrase (like "two slices") or a common household unit (1/2 cup). It's followed by the metric measure (64g or 125ml). Compare how much you actually eat to the amount of food listed in the Nutrition Facts table.
- A food or drink's energy value is listed in **calories**.
- Most nutrients (like fat, sodium and fibre) are measured in grams (g) or milligrams (mg).
- Most nutrients also include a **% Daily Value (% DV)**. The % DV is a tool to help you see if a specific amount of food has a little or a lot of a nutrient.
- Vitamins and minerals are expressed only as a % DV, based on how much you should have each day for a healthy diet.

An **ingredient list** is also found on food labels. Ingredients are listed by weight, and those with the greatest weights are listed first. The list can help you figure out what is in your food, and how much of one ingredient there is relative to another. There may be some items on the ingredient list that you are not familiar with. Sometimes nutrients like saturated and trans fats, sodium and sugar can appear on an ingredient list under many different names.

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NUTRITION CLAIMS

There are two types of **nutrition claims** on food labels:

- 1. Nutrient content claims**, like “reduced in **sodium**” or “source of **calcium**,” describe the amount of a specific nutrient in a food. They may help you choose a food that contains a nutrient that you may want less of (like sodium) or a nutrient that you may want more of (like calcium).
- 2. Health claims** tell you about the relationship between a nutrient or food and a specific disease. An example is *a healthy diet low in saturated and **trans fats** may reduce the risk of **heart disease**.*

You can use both types of nutrition claims as starting points, but don't rely only on them to make food choices. Use the Nutrition Facts and the list of ingredients to get a complete picture of a food product.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPECIFIC AMOUNT OF FOOD

The nutrition information found in the Nutrition Facts table is based on the **amount of food** listed. If you eat more or less than the amount listed, you will be taking in more or less of the nutrients and calories. For example, if you normally eat one cup of cereal and the specific amount of food is listed as one-half of a cup, you would need to double the quantities listed to know exactly what you are eating.

You can still choose between two food products, even if the amounts of food don't look the same:

- Compare the amount of food by looking at the metric measure, usually in grams or millilitres.

For example, Cracker A has a similar amount of food (23 g) compared to Cracker B (20 g). So you can still compare these two crackers, even if the number of crackers is different.

Cracker A

Nutrition Facts			
Per 9 crackers (23 g)			
Amount		% Daily Value	
Calories 90			
Fat 4.5 g		7 %	
Saturated 2.5 g + Trans 0 g		13 %	
Cholesterol 0 mg			
Sodium 275 mg		12 %	
Carbohydrate 12 g		4 %	
Fibre 1 g		4 %	
Sugars 0 g			
Protein 3 g			
Vitamin A	0 %	Vitamin C	0 %
Calcium	2 %	Iron	8 %

Cracker B

Nutrition Facts			
Per 4 crackers (20 g)			
Amount	% Daily Value		
Calories 85			
Fat 2 g			3 %
Saturated 0.3 g			
+ Trans 0 g			2 %
Cholesterol 0 mg			
Sodium 90 mg			4 %
Carbohydrate 15 g			5 %
Fibre 3 g			12 %
Sugars 1 g			
Protein 2 g			
Vitamin A	0 %	Vitamin C	0 %
Calcium	2 %	Iron	7 %

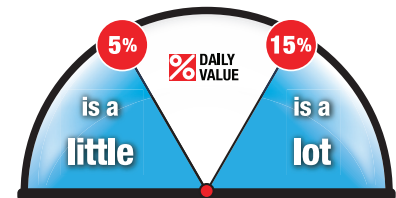
- Compare the amount of the two food products that you would eat at one meal.

For example, you can compare two slices of bread (70 g) to one bagel (90 g), since you would likely eat either at one time. You can also compare a 125 g container of yogurt to a 175 g one, since you would be likely to have either one as a single serving.

UNDERSTANDING THE % DAILY VALUE

The **% DV** is an important part of the Nutrition Facts table, to help you see if a food has a little or a lot of a nutrient. Use this three-step approach to make healthier food choices:

- 1. Look at the amount of food.**
- 2. Read the % Daily Value.**



5% DV or less is a little } This applies to all nutrients
15% DV or more is a lot }

- 3. Choose.**

Make a better choice for you. Here are the nutrients that you may want...

...less of	...more of
• fat	• fibre
• saturated and trans fats	• iron
• sodium	• vitamin A
	• calcium

BENEFITS OF READING NUTRITION LABELS

Nutrition labelling helps you make better food choices for yourself and your family.

Nutrition labelling is also important to millions of Canadians and their family members who have, or are at risk of, chronic diseases like some types of **cancer**, **diabetes**, **high blood pressure** and **stroke**.

It can help them better manage special diets. For example, if you are concerned about high blood pressure and are trying to limit your intake of sodium, you can use the % Daily Value to quickly tell if a food has a little or a lot of this nutrient.



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THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

Health Canada provides educational information on its website, including interactive features and tips on how to make healthier food choices using the % DV found in the Nutrition Facts table. A ready-to-use presentation is also available for educators and health care providers to teach about how to make informed food choices using the nutrition information on food labels.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for nutrition labelling compliance and enforcement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- *Étiquetage des aliments* fact sheet at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/cons/fact-fiche-eng.php
- Interactive tools on how to use the % Daily Value and the amount of food at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/cons/dv-vq/interact-eng.php
- *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* at:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
- The Canadian Diabetes Association and Dietitians of Canada's website at:
www.diabetes.ca

FOR INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONALS

- A ready-to-use presentation for educators called *Wagging Tails* at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/educat/info-nutri-label-etiquet-eng.php
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's *Guide to Food Labelling and Advertising* at:
www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeti/guide/toce.shtml

RELATED RESOURCES

- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the *Healthy Canadians* website at:
www.healthycanadians.gc.ca
- For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* web section at:
www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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