

## How to Read Food Labels: A Step-by-Step Guide

Food labels can be confusing, but understanding them empowers you to make better choices. Knowing what to look for helps you avoid hidden additives, excess sugar, and artificial ingredients. Here's a detailed breakdown of how to analyze food labels effectively.

### 1. Check the Serving Size

Many packaged foods contain multiple servings, making the nutrition facts seem lower than they actually are.

- Compare the serving size with how much you actually eat.
- Pay attention to calories per serving—if you eat two servings, you are consuming double the listed calories, sugar, and sodium.

### 2. Read the Ingredients List Carefully

Ingredients are listed in order of quantity—those at the beginning make up most of the product.

- Look for shorter ingredient lists with whole foods like oats, nuts, or seeds.
- Avoid long lists with chemical names, artificial colors, and preservatives.
- Watch for hidden dairy, gluten, or allergens if you have sensitivities.

### 3. Identify Added Sugars

Sugar is often disguised under different names. Check for:

- High-fructose corn syrup
- Dextrose, maltose, fructose
- Cane juice, rice syrup, agave nectar

**\*\*Tip:\*\*** The Nutrition Facts panel lists Added Sugars separately, making tracking easier.

#### 4. Watch for Artificial Ingredients

Many packaged foods contain artificial flavors, colors, and preservatives.

- Artificial colors: Red 40, Yellow 5, Blue 1 (often found in candy, drinks, and processed snacks).
- Artificial sweeteners: Aspartame, sucralose, saccharin (common in diet sodas and sugar-free products).
- Flavor enhancers: Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is used to enhance taste.

**\*\*Healthier Choice:\*\*** Look for natural flavors and colors from fruit, vegetable extracts, and spices.

#### 5. Look for Preservatives

Preservatives extend shelf life but may not be necessary in your diet.

- Nitrates/Nitrites (found in deli meats and bacon).
- BHA & BHT (used in cereals, chips, and processed snacks).
- Sodium benzoate (used in sodas and condiments).

If you prefer to minimize preservatives, choose fresh, organic, or minimally processed foods.

#### 6. Prioritize Whole Foods Over Processed Ones

- Choose simple, whole ingredients over highly processed foods.
- Look for healthy fats (olive oil, avocado oil) rather than hydrogenated oils.
- Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables are better than canned versions with added sugars or sodium.

# Reading nutrition facts labels

## Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container  
Serving Size 2 oz (56g)

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Amount per serving  
**Calories** **200**

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	% Daily Value*
<b>Total Fat</b> 1g	<b>2%</b>
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 42g	<b>14%</b>
Dietary Fiber 2g	
Total Sugars 2g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	<b>0%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 7g	
Vitamin D	<b>0%</b>
Calcium	<b>0%</b>
Iron	<b>10%</b>
Potassium	<b>5%</b>

\*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a healthy diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

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**INGREDIENTS:** SEMOLINA (WHEAT), DURUM WHEAT FLOUR, NIACIN, IRON (FERROUS SULFATE), THIAMINE MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID.

**CONTAINS:** WHEAT.

**Serving Size:** Indicates the number of servings per container and the individual serving size

**Calories:** Shows the number of calories provided in a single serving

**Amount per serving:** Nutrients with an established daily requirement will show the amount in both weight and % daily value to help you understand how you're achieving your dietary requirements

**Daily Values:** Reflects the percentage of daily nutrient requirement provided in a single serving (5% or less is low, 20% or more is high)

**Total Sugars:** Indicates the amount of both naturally-occurring and added sugar present in a single serving

**Added Sugars:** Indicates the amount of sugar from added sources in a single serving

**Lists the nutrients** that are generally low in current diets to help you consume enough

**Ingredients** are listed in order of predominance.

**Allergens** are listed at the bottom of the label.

### **Example Food Label Breakdown**

Below is a sample nutrition label for a granola bar. Let's break it down:

#### **\*\*Nutrition Facts\*\***

Serving Size: 1 bar (45g)

Calories: 200

Total Fat: 8g

Saturated Fat: 1g

Sodium: 85mg

Total Carbohydrates: 26g

Dietary Fiber: 3g

Total Sugars: 12g

Added Sugars: 9g

Protein: 5g

#### **\*\*Key Takeaways:\*\***

- High in added sugars (9g) – Consider a lower-sugar option.
- Contains dietary fiber (3g) – A good sign for digestion.
- Moderate protein (5g) – Helps with satiety.
- Low sodium (85mg) – A better choice compared to many processed snacks.

### **Final Thoughts**

Learning to read food labels takes practice, but small changes can lead to better food choices. Next time you shop, challenge yourself to analyze three labels and compare their ingredients and added sugar content. The more you know, the easier it becomes to choose foods that align with your health goals!