

# Read Food Labels



**CHALLENGE**  
Take time to learn about what you're eating

How much do you know about food labels? Take this quiz to find out.

T F

1.   Food labels recommend adults eat about 2,000 calories a day.
2.   One small package of food is usually just one serving.
3.   You should avoid or limit foods high in saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium.
4.   Fresh fruits and vegetables don't come with a food label, but they're the best source of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. And they're low in calories.
5.   Ingredients on a food label are listed by amount from largest to smallest.

How did you do? If you answered any of these statements incorrectly, you could benefit from learning more about how to read food labels. Just because a drink or package of food is small, doesn't mean it's a single serving. In many cases, it's two or more servings. Reading food labels can help you control your weight, prevent or manage chronic diseases, and improve your health.

Answers. 1. True. 2. False. 3. True. 4. True. 5. True.

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Read Food Labels."
2. Take time to read food labels to learn more about your diet and food choices on at least 22 days this month.
3. Keep a record of your completed health challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



**W**hen California resident Raul Robles was hungry, he grabbed fast food. And not just burgers and fries. He also drank two liters of soda a day. He didn't think much about how many calories he was taking in. The food was quick and cheap.

But it wasn't sustainable. In just a few years, he tipped the scale at 344 pounds. When he developed diabetes and high blood pressure, he thought about weight-loss surgery. But his doctor said he needed to learn healthy eating habits first. And that's when Robles started reading food labels.

He soon realized he was eating up to 7,000 calories a day. And that had to change if he wanted to lose weight, manage diabetes, and lower his blood pressure.

He quit drinking diet soda and eating fast food. He began eating a lot more fruits and vegetables. They're low in calories and packed with vitamins and nutrients. And he added regular exercise to his daily routine.

Little by little, he started to tip the scale in the right direction. For two years, he read food labels, tracked everything in his diet, and exercised regularly. And he lost 152 pounds.

Want to improve your diet to lose weight, manage a condition, or prevent chronic disease? Reading food labels can help. It only takes a second to pick up a package, look for specific information, and then make a decision. Take the month-long health challenge to *Read Food Labels*.

## The Power of Reading Food Labels

If you already eat well and exercise at least 30 minutes a day, keep it up. But what if your diet needs a makeover? What does it take to change the way you eat?

Simply start by reading food labels. A recent study looked at the overall health, weight, eating habits, and food purchases of about 26,000 people. They found that people who read food labels weighed less than those who don't.

Why? Reading food labels helps you be more aware of what you're eating. And it helps you make healthier choices. That's what happened to Robles.

"I learned that I was eating between 5,000 to 7,000 calories on a daily basis," says Robles. "This was a major reason why my previous weight-loss efforts failed. Even though I would walk for 30 minutes a day, the calories I was burning were not even close to the amount I was consuming."

**Video:**

How to read a food label  
<http://tinyurl.com/j3ocuzp>

# Read Food Labels: Here's What to Look For

You're on your way to the grocery store armed with your shopping list. You've got meal plans in mind for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and a few snacks. But are your food choices healthy? Before you drop stuff into your shopping basket, take a minute to read each food label. Here's what to look for:

Keep track of calories and nutrition  
[tinyurl.com/j7gartp](http://tinyurl.com/j7gartp)

## Ingredients

Check the food label to see what's in the food you're about to buy. Ingredients are listed in order by amount from largest to smallest. You'll find out if a food is made from whole grains or less healthy refined grains. And if it's highly processed, you'll likely see a long list of chemicals, food colorings, and additives on the list. The less processed, the healthier the food.



What's the biggest ingredient in this instant "Spring Vegetable" soup?

## Percent Daily Value

The right column on the food label shows you the recommended Percent Daily Value for each nutrient. Each value is based on 2,000 calories a day. You may need less.

Aim to keep Percent Daily Value low (below 5 percent) for total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium.

Aim to keep Percent Daily Value high (above 20 %) for vitamins and minerals.



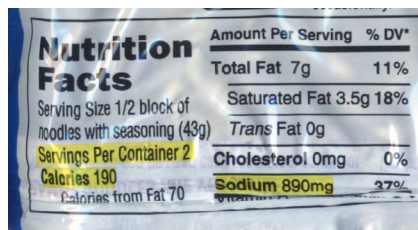
A fruit pie contains a high Percent Daily Value of Total Fat.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 pie (128 g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 404	Calories from Fat 181
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 21g	32%
Saturated Fat 3g	16%
Trans Fat	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 479mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 55g	18%
Dietary Fiber 3g	13%
Sugars 27g	
Protein 4g	

## Serving Size

Most people aren't very good at guessing serving sizes. So they eat more than they should. Check the food label to see how much a serving size really is. You might be surprised that a small bag or package of food actually contains two or three servings.

If you eat a whole block of these ramen noodles, how many calories and milligrams of sodium will you consume?



## Calories

If you're watching your weight, you should know how many calories you're consuming per day. Look for calories per serving on the food label. Keep track using a food diary or mobile app.

When you know what to look for, reading a food label can be an easy way to decide if a food is healthy or not. If you have food allergies, or need to follow a special diet, talk to your doctor or nutritionist about other things you should look for on food labels.

**Quiz:** What does a serving size really look like?  
[tinyurl.com/jb5fh8o](http://tinyurl.com/jb5fh8o)

## Food for Thought

The Nutrition Facts Panel provides you with a lot of information you can use to improve your diet and your health. Here are some additional guidelines:

- **Limit sodium.** Eat less than 1,500 mg per day to control blood pressure and protect your heart. Fast food, processed meats, and canned soups are all high in sodium.
- **Watch out for added sugar.** Limit sugar to no more than 36 grams per day for men; 20 grams for women. Sugary drinks, cereals, and sweets are all high in added sugar. Too much sugar can also lead to weight gain and other chronic diseases.
- **Eat more fiber-rich foods.** Women need 25 grams of fiber per day. Men need 38 grams per day. Eating foods high in fiber helps control weight, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels, and improves digestion. Whole-grains, fruits, and vegetables are the best fiber sources.
- **Pay attention to good fats vs. bad fats.** Avoid or limit foods with saturated fats (like cheese and red meats) and trans fats (like desserts, margarine, crackers, and fast food). Aim to eat more foods with healthy fats like fish, nuts and seeds, and olive oil.
- **Limit cholesterol.** Foods like meat and dairy products are high in LDL (bad) cholesterol. They can raise your risk for heart disease and other health problems. Fortunately, eating more fiber-rich foods can raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels and protect your heart.

Sources: Agricultural Economics.; American Diabetes Association.; American Heart Association.; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.; Institutes of Medicine.; National Institutes of Health.; National Weight Control Registry.

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**Instructions**

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you read food labels to learn more about your diet and food choices.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you read food labels and took time to learn about what you're eating. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____	HC <input type="checkbox"/> ex. min. _____		
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I read food labels to learn about diet and food choices

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_