

Read Food Labels: 10 Things to Look For

Pick up a package of food at the grocery store, and chances are pretty good it includes a food label. Restaurants with more than 20 locations must publish nutrition information too.³ If you want to improve your diet and your health, read food labels.



Here's what to look for:

1 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.

Tip: You might be surprised that a small bag or package of food actually contains two or three servings.

2 Calories

If you're watching your weight, you should know how many calories you're consuming per day.

Do this: Look for calories per serving on the food label. Keep track using a food diary or mobile app.

3 Sugar

Limit sugar to no more than:

- 36 grams per day for men
- 20 grams per day for women

Sugary drinks, cereals, and sweets are all high in added sugar. The problem with too much sugar: It can lead to weight gain and other chronic diseases.

Sugar rush: A typical 20-ounce bottle of soda contains 65g of sugar...a lot more than the daily limit.

4 Sodium

The American Heart Association recommends eating less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. If you have high blood pressure, your daily sodium intake should be 1,500 mg or less.⁴

Check sodium content: Many frozen and packaged microwave meals contain 600 to 1,200 mg of sodium per meal. Fast foods like burgers, fries, and pizza are high in sodium, too.

5 Fiber

Did you know the average adult in the U.S. only eats about 16g of fiber per day?⁵ And it's not enough.

- Women need 25 grams of fiber per day.
- Men need 38 grams per day.

Eating foods high in fiber control weight, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels, and improves digestion. Whole-grains, fruits, and vegetables are the best fiber sources.

6 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.

7 Cholesterol

Foods like meat and dairy products are high in LDL (bad) cholesterol. They can raise your risk for heart disease and other

Food Labels & The 5-Second Rule



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?

Start reading food labels. It only takes a few seconds to read a food label, look for specific information, and then make a decision.

In a recent study, researchers found that reading food labels helped people, eat:²

- -6.6% fewer calories
- -10.6% less fat
- -13% less junk food
- +13.5% more vegetables



Train your brain: Reading food labels helps you be more aware of what you're eating. Get the skinny on things like serving size, calories, sodium, sugar, fat, and ingredients, and then make a choice.

health problems. Fortunately, eating more fiber-rich foods can raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels and protect your heart.

8 Protein

Protein needs vary based on things like age, weight, and activity level. Your body needs protein for bones, muscle, hair, blood, and more. How much protein do you need?⁶

Do the math: (Weight) x (0.36) = Minimum daily protein needs

9 Percent Daily Value

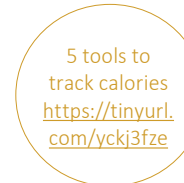
The right column on the food label shows you the recommended Percent Daily Value for each nutrient. Each value is based on 2,000 calories a day. You may need less.

10 Ingredients

What's in your food? Check the list of ingredients on the food label. They're listed in order by amount from largest to smallest.

- **Made with whole grains or refined grains?** Check the ingredients.
- **Highly processed?** Check the ingredients for chemicals, food colorings, and additives.

Tip: Less processed + fewer ingredients = healthier food



Want to improve your diet and your health? Read food labels.

References

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