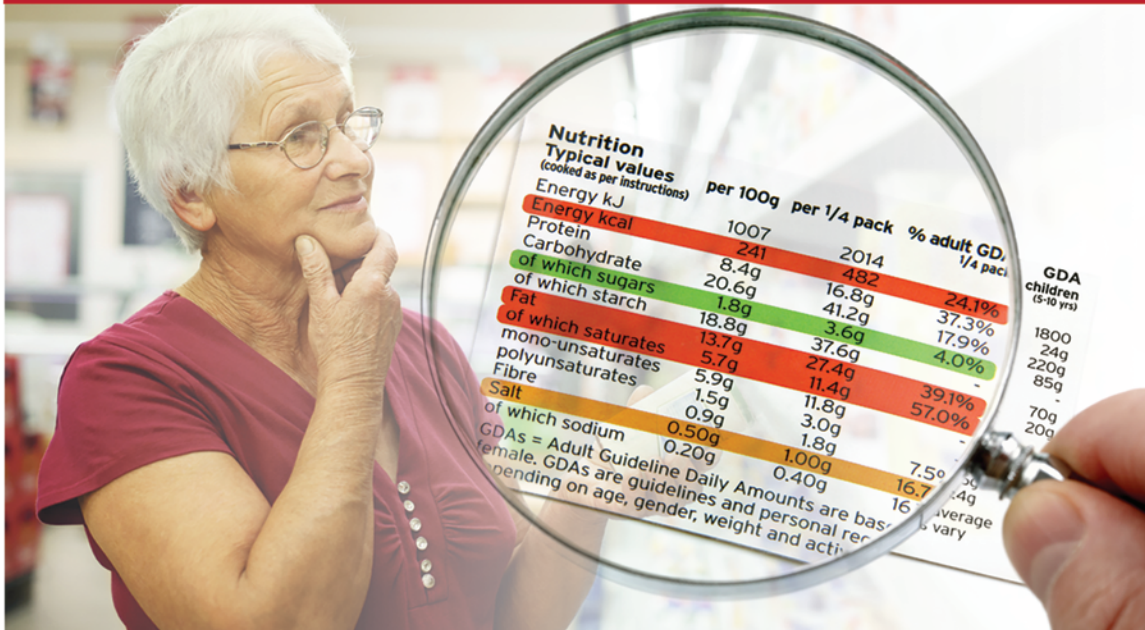


THE BLOOD PRESSURE SOLUTION

How To Read A Food Label



A Simple Guide To
Overcoming the Intimidation,
Understanding the Basics, and
Shopping with Confidence

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How to Read a Food Label

One of the most important things you can do for your own nutrition is to know what you're eating. In recent years, food labels have become much more user friendly, and you really *can* know exactly what you're putting in your body.

Your relationship with food is very important. What you eat can help to give you energy, improve your immunity, and allow you to combat many diseases. But it can also do the opposite – leave you feeling weak and even cause disease.



I know what you're thinking. Reading what's on the label... it can be a challenge, right? If you've ever found yourself standing in a crowded grocery aisle, trying to make sense of all of that information, and just doing your best to understand the importance of all of the ingredients, you've probably felt the pressure. You've sensed those irritated glares from impatient shoppers, just looking to grab something from the shelf behind you. But there you stood, immobilized, scratching your head in confusion, attempting to calculate all of those numbers and

their percentages. It doesn't take long to realize that your quick shopping trip just turned into an overwhelming nightmare for *everyone* on aisle seven! I know you're wondering if it's really worth all of that trouble.

But I want you to understand that shopping for healthy food doesn't have to be a frustrating experience. Because once you know the basics you'll be strolling the aisles, reading labels, and choosing the right foods with **CONFIDENCE**.

Just follow these simple guidelines, and as you begin to limit your foods that have labels on them in favor of whole foods, *you'll begin to see your health improve dramatically.*

First, is this a REAL food?

By “real food” we mean something that is not that far away from its original form. This can mean that it has only a couple of ingredients in it, or that it hasn’t been heavily processed. An example would be “real” butter versus some “butter-like spread”. One (the butter) has two ingredients in it (cream and salt), and the other has a lot, some of which are heavily processed (like soy oil).

One “trick” to seeing if this is a real food is to see how many ingredients are on the label, and how many of them you would find in your own home. The more ingredients and the larger the chemical names, the more “fake” this food, is, and the less you want to eat it if you want to be healthy. Another “trick” is that often (not all the time, but a lot) a processed food comes in a bag, box, or can. Conveniently, those bags, boxes, and cans also come with food labels on them so you can see how many ingredients are in them.

Be Smart about Serving Size

Begin with looking at the serving size on the label. Sometimes people miss this part of the label and then have an inaccurate idea of how much they’re actually eating. For example, if you have a can of soup and the label says it’s 2 servings, that means that the amount per serving listed on the label would be doubled if you ate the whole can.



The serving size amounts listed on many labels have improved recently, but be cautious. Many similar (even identical) items may not always share the same serving size on the label.

The Duo of Sugar and Salt

The next couple of things to look at are the sodium content and the carbohydrate count. Sodium found in processed foods is ABSOLUTELY one of the biggest driving factors of high blood pressure. High sodium is often found in these more processed or “fake” foods because a lot of big companies process the food’s true flavor out, and they also tend to add a lot of salt back in to have

it taste better. If people eat a lot of processed foods, that definitely overloads their system, causing high blood pressure.

Sugar (and the whole category of carbohydrates) is also found in high amounts in a lot of processed foods, since it also makes the food taste better. The problem is, the insulin released in response to it causes an increase in fluids in your body and drives high blood pressure as well. The sugar part of the label is included in the “Carbohydrate” count, so while you can look at both, the Carbohydrate listing is the most complete.



Calorie Breakdown

A little farther down the list of importance is calories. “How can that be?”, you ask. “I’ve always counted calories!” While calories ARE important, and you can definitely gain weight if you eat too many of them, the old model of counting calories to lose weight is being shifted to counting carbohydrate grams.

While we used to think it was all about the math, we forgot a few things. The old calorie-counting model that said a gram of carbs had 4 calories and a gram of fat had 9 calories conveniently forgot that the gram of carbohydrate came with its corresponding insulin reaction. ***And the moment insulin is in your blood stream, you cannot burn fat.*** That’s actually a normal reaction, but in our commitment to the high-carb diet of the Food Pyramid, we then had insulin in our system nearly all the time, and our waistlines increased as well. On the other hand, that gram of fat? It made you feel full, and that’s what research showed as well — that, for your weight and health, it’s easier and more effective to count carbohydrates and eat normal amounts of fat than it is to eat low calorie.

But it’s still good to know calories, because they give you some information, like how much energy it takes to break down the food. The higher the calories, the longer it will take to break it down.

Regarding calories, do your best at reading the label, but understand that it may not be fully accurate. The FDA allows a 20% margin of error regarding calories

on a label. A recent study done by Tufts University found that packaged foods can contain 8% more calories than stated on the label, while restaurant foods had nearly 20% more calories than they said.¹

Your metabolism is the measure of how much energy you burn over a period of time. While we often think of exercising as burning calories, the effect of exercise is small compared to the total calories you burn.

When your heart beats, you breathe in and out, your body breaks down nutrients and makes new blood cells, you're burning calories. How many calories you individually need, though, varies, which is why you can't follow the generalization of the average person needing 2000 calories per day. It just depends on your age, how active you are, how healthy you are.... a lot of reasons! So while calories are important, they are only one part of the overall picture.

The Fiber Issue

When it comes to carbohydrates, some are better for you than others. Let's be clear – you need carbohydrates to have energy and to be healthy. Any diet that tells you to eliminate them completely is unhealthy.

A food label will break down carbohydrates into two categories – fiber and sugars. While you're going to rein in the overall carbohydrate count (and the sugar count that's included), pay attention to fiber as well, as many people don't have enough of this nutrient in their diets. You want to look for foods that are high in fiber, as we're supposed to have 28 grams per day. The best way to get this is by eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

Fiber can help you to lower your cholesterol and helps your digestive system to be more regular, and most importantly, it helps you feel full.

1. Urban, Lorien E., et al. "The accuracy of stated energy contents of reduced-energy, commercially prepared foods." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 110.1 (2010): 116-123.

The Purpose of Protein

Your body must have protein to build structures. Most of the structures inside you consist of protein, and in order to have the building blocks to repair cells and develop muscles, you'll need to eat food that has this important molecule.

A food label will tell you the number of grams of protein in your food. You'll want to look for foods that are high in protein. Foods that have a lot of protein include nuts, meats, whole grain foods, and dairy products.

The Facts About Fats

Food labels will also give you information about fats. In the past, health practitioners told patients to avoid fat altogether. But it turns out that modern science doesn't support that type of diet. You actually need fats, both saturated and unsaturated, just like you need other molecules in your food.

Just a few little facts about fats you might not know — one is, all fats are a mix of saturated and unsaturated. There's no such thing as a fat being purely one or the other. The second is, that research that told you saturated fat causes heart disease — that's being proven wrong even as you read this. Not only that, it has been shown to be wrong in research dating back over 15 years!

It turns out that what causes heart disease are two basic things — insulin, (which causes you to lay down the small, dense LDL that makes plaque), and processed vegetable oils, (like corn, soy, safflower, and vegetable). Those oils are high in Omega-6's, which, if you get too many of them, cause inflammation. And if you eat out a lot, or use those oils at home, you definitely get too many of them. They also contribute to oxidized LDL, which causes plaque, as well.

One of the most dangerous types of fat, though, are trans fats and hydrogenated fats. They have been shown to lower your HDL (the good kind) and increase your small, dense LDL (the bad kind). They also increase



triglycerides, inflammation, and heart disease. The National Academy of Sciences says, “there is no safe level of trans fat consumption. There is no adequate level, recommended daily amount or tolerable upper limit for trans fats. This is because any incremental increase in trans fat intake increases the risk of coronary heart disease.”

The reason they are so dangerous is because, to your body, they “look” like saturated fats, and you use saturated fats for a lot of important things, like protection in cell membranes and to transport minerals around your body. A trans fat, or hydrogenated fat, “looks” chemically close enough that your body can’t see the difference, and then puts that bad fat in all the places it would use a good saturated fat. This leads to damage all over your body — you can’t detect it, but it can cause some serious health issues. They are so dangerous that trans fats have been *banned* in some countries.

You find these trans fats and hydrogenated fats in processed foods like inexpensive supermarket cakes and icings, cookies, and chips. It’s also often used to fry foods in restaurants, and in refrigerated doughs, like cookie dough, cinnamon rolls, biscuits, pie crusts and pizza crusts, as well as non-dairy creamers, and stick margarine. When you look at a label, watch for words like “partially hydrogenated.” Even if the label says “trans fat-free”, it might not be — if it has less than 0.5 g per serving, it can still get labeled “trans fat-free.”

Another reason to stay away from processed, fake food!

Sodium Safety

Another nutrient that food labels provide information about is sodium. Sodium is the fancy, scientific term for salt. If you have normal blood pressure you probably don’t pay too much attention to salt. But if you’re suffering from high blood pressure, you can’t ignore it!

Sodium causes your body to hold onto water, and in turn raises your blood pressure. High blood pressure is a leading risk factor



for heart disease and stroke. So if you have this issue, you need to check the labels. Like I mentioned earlier, processed foods tend to much higher in sodium than real food you might make at home, so it's good to check the label. If you're eating a more processed food, then you'll want to look for labels that have low amounts of sodium or are even free from it. Some foods are labeled as "low sodium" but you still need to look at the label and see where it fits in with your needs.

Eating Vitamins and Minerals

While most people could use a multivitamin each day, the best way to get your vitamins and minerals is through the food you eat. In food, you find these vitamins and minerals in a natural state, one that's easy for your body to absorb.

Food labels will give you an idea of what nutrients can be found in a specific food. Look for foods that are high in vitamins and minerals such as calcium, potassium, magnesium, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin A, and beta-carotene.

Making Time for Reading Food Labels

When you're new at reading food labels, it can seem overwhelming. But the more you do it, the easier it becomes. You'll also have your "go-to" foods that you can just pick up without revisiting the label every time.

Plan to spend some extra time at the grocery store when you're paying more attention to food labels. Take notice of what nutrients you're looking to limit and what you need to add to your diet. Before you shop, make a list of what you need to get.

Then, as you're shopping, make a list of additional foods that you'd like to incorporate into your diet. You may also want to make a list of foods you'd like to avoid. Perhaps something you've always loved has way more sugar or carbs than you can "afford." Spend some time looking for a substitute that's on the healthier side.

Understanding Ingredients

The other list you'll find on a nutrition label – or near it – is a list of ingredients. It's important to be able to identify all of the ingredients that are included in the foods you eat. Don't be deceived by the pretty packages— some may say that they're "healthy", but they may actually contain a host of artificial additives and preservatives.



Another important thing to ask yourself is this, "what's first on the list?". Ingredients on products are listed in order from greatest amount to least amount in the food. Paying attention to the list of ingredients, and the order in which they're listed, can be very helpful for determining if a food is something you want to eat or not.

Some ingredients you might want to *avoid* include:

- Corn syrup (highly processed sugar)
- Fructose, high fructose corn syrup, crystallized fructose, or anything with fructose in it
- Sugar, dextrose, sucrose, maltose, glucose (there's a complete list below)
- Hydrogenated oils
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Artificial coloring
- Artificial sweeteners (sucralose, aspartame, saccharin)

Other names for sugar that's often hidden in the ingredient list are:

Cane juice, Dehydrated cane juice, Cane juice solids, Cane juice crystals, Dextrin, Maltodextrin, Dextran, Barley malt, Beet sugar, Corn syrup, Corn syrup solids, Caramel, Buttered syrup, Carob syrup, Brown sugar, Date sugar, Malt syrup, Diatase, Diatastic malt, Fruit juice, Fruit juice concentrate, Dehydrated fruit juice, Fruit juice crystals, Golden syrup, Turbinado, Sorghum syrup, Refiner's syrup, Ethyl maltol, Maple syrup, and Yellow sugar.

Once you start reading food labels, you'll be surprised to find out how many additives are in processed foods. While some foods with labels are healthy for you, there are a lot of foods that come in cans, boxes, and bags, that contain harmful ingredients. The length of the ingredient list should also give you a clue!

Ingredients that are not natural and come from chemical processing are generally not good for your body. A rule of thumb to follow is that, if you can't pronounce the ingredient, you probably shouldn't eat it.

Watch for certain words or phrases that can trick you:

- **Imitation** — you should just eat the real thing
- **Natural** — just because it doesn't have synthetics in it doesn't make it healthy
- **Spread** — for example, a butter-like spread, rather than healthier, real butter
- **Reduced/less** — doesn't mean it's that much less than the original
- **Light/lite** — low fat food is highly processed. Get the real, full fat thing instead.
- **Anything that doesn't use its real name** — for example, "creamer" vs. actual cream
- **Made with real fruit** — doesn't say how much, and it's typically so little as to be next to none.

Most of all, use some common sense. A breakfast cereal with sugar will never be your best choice, even if it says "heart healthy" on the label.

Foods Without Labels

When it comes to nutrition, the best thing you can do is look for foods that don't require labels. Most of these finds are found around the outer edges of the grocery store and not in the inner aisles. These are foods such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meats. The less processed your food is, the healthier it will be.



Other foods have labels, but are *also* close to their natural state. This includes food such as:

- Full-fat milk, cheese, butter, plain full-fat yogurt
- Real eggs
- Freshly baked, whole grain bread
- Whole grain cereals (not too much, though!)
- Natural peanut butter and almond butters
- Hummus spread
- Saurkraut

You didn't have to make these yourself, but they *are* good examples of foods that haven't been heavily processed.

When you're shopping, using food labels can help you to make good choices. Keep it simple, and cover the basics: look for "real" foods, ideally without labels. If you have to go for any packaged foods, look for those that are high in nutrition, and with few ingredients listed on the label. Choose those that have little or no chemical additives or preservatives, no trans and/or hydrogenated fats, and no processed sugars.

And be mindful of deceptive packaging. Don't decide based on what's on the front of the package without first checking the ingredients list to see what's actually inside. This will help you to prevent disease, have more energy, and even help you to shrink your waistline.

