

UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES • Fact Sheet

HOW TO READ THE NUTRITION FACTS LABEL

(adapted from the US Food and Drug Administration website)

Sample label
for Macaroni & Cheese:

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g) Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

1 Start Here →

2 Check Calories

3 Limit these Nutrients

4 Get Enough of these Nutrients

5 Footnote

6 Quick Guide to % DV

- 5% or less is Low
- 20% or more is High

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

1 THE SERVING SIZE

- **Serving sizes are standardized to help you compare similar foods.**
- **Pay attention to the serving size and how many servings are in a food package.** In the sample label, one serving of macaroni and cheese equals 1 cup. If you eat the whole package, you will be eating 2 cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers.

2 CALORIES (AND CALORIES FROM FAT)

- **Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from eating a serving of food.** In our sample label, 1 serving of macaroni and cheese contains 250 calories.
- **The number of servings you consume determines the number of calories you actually eat.** Eating the whole package (or 2 servings) of this mac and cheese means you will consume 500 calories.
- **Pay attention to how many calories from your serving come from fat.** For example, 110 calories out of 250 calories of this mac and cheese come from fat. That means almost half the calories in a serving comes from fat!

GENERAL CALORIE GUIDE (Based on a 2000 Calorie Diet)	
Low	40 calories/serving
Moderate	100 calories/serving
High	400 calories/serving

3 4 THE NUTRIENTS: HOW MUCH?

- **Limit these nutrients: fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and sodium (shown in yellow in the example label).** These are the nutrients listed first on a Nutrition Facts label. Your goal is to keep your intake of these nutrients as low as possible. Too much fat, cholesterol, and sodium in your diet increases the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and some cancers.
 - Limit your sodium intake to no more than 2500mg per day.
 - For a 2000 calorie diet, limit your total fat intake to no more than 60 grams a day. This includes less than 17 grams of saturated fat, less than 2 grams of trans fat, and less than 300 mg of cholesterol.

- Most of your fat intake should come from unsaturated fats, which are found in olive oil, peanut oil, nuts, fish, avocados, etc. These are considered "healthy fats" because they don't raise cholesterol levels like saturated fats and trans fats do.
- When the nutrition label says that a food contains "0 g" of trans fat, it really means that the food contains less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving. If "partially hydrogenated oil" is in the ingredient list of a "0 g trans fat" food, then the food contains trans fat, but less than 0.5 grams per serving. That means if you eat multiple servings, you could quickly reach your daily limit (2 grams) of trans fat.
- **Get enough of these nutrients: dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron** (shown in blue in the example label). Most Americans don't get enough of these nutrients in their diet.
 - A diet high in dietary fiber promotes healthy bowel function.
 - Getting enough calcium in your diet reduces the risk of osteoporosis.
 - A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain fiber (especially soluble fiber), and low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease.

5 UNDERSTANDING THE FOOTNOTE

- **Notice the * used after the heading "% Daily Value" at the top of the Nutrition Facts label.**
 - It refers to the Footnote in the bottom part of the nutrition label, which states that **the Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.** This statement must be on all food labels. The remaining information in the full footnote may not be shown on smaller food packages.
 - **When the full footnote does appear, it will always be the same on every package.** This is because it shows recommended dietary advice for all Americans. It is not about a specific food product.
- **Daily values (DVs) are the recommended levels of intake of each nutrient.**
 - The DVs in the footnote are based on 2000 and 2500 calorie diets.
 - Notice how the DVs for some nutrients change, while others (cholesterol and sodium) remain the same for both calorie amounts.

6 THE PERCENT DAILY VALUE (%DV)

- **The % Daily Values (%DVs) are based on a 2000 calorie diet.** You may need more or less than 2000 calories/day, depending on your age, gender, and activity levels.
- **The %DVs come from these nutrition guidelines:**
 - **60%** of calories (or 1200 calories) should come from carbohydrates.
 - **10%** of calories (or 200 calories) should come from protein.
 - **30%** of calories (or no more than 600 calories) should come from fat, with most fats coming from unsaturated fats.
- **The %DV helps you tell if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient:**

5% DV or less	LOW
10-19% DV	MEDIUM
20% DV or more	HIGH

If you want to consume less of a nutrient (like fat or cholesterol), choose foods with a 5% DV or less.

If you want to consume more of a nutrient (like fiber), choose foods with a 20% DV or more.

Now take a look at the amount of Total Fat in 1 serving listed on our sample mac and cheese label:

- **Is 18% DV contributing a lot or a little to your fat limit of 100% DV?** Based on the %DV guidelines above, 18% DV is not yet high (because it's less than 20% DV).
- **But what if you ate the whole package (2 servings)?** You would double that amount, eating 36% of your daily allowance for Total Fat. That means you would only have 64% of your fat allowance left for ALL the rest of the day's food, including snacks and drinks.

USING THE %DVs

- **Comparisons:** Use the %DV to compare products or brands. Just make sure the serving sizes are similar, especially the weight (ie. grams, milligrams, ounces). When the serving sizes are similar, it's easy to see which foods are higher or lower in nutrients by looking at the %DV.
- **Nutrient Content Claims:** Use the %DV to distinguish claims from one another, such as "reduced fat", "light" or "nonfat." Just compare the %DVs for Total Fat in each food product.
- **Dietary Trade-Offs:** Use the %DV to make dietary trade-offs with other foods. You don't have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. When a food you like is high in fat, balance it with foods that are low in fat. Just make sure that the total amount of fat you eat for the day stays below 100% DV.
- **To limit nutrients that have no %DV listed,** like trans fat and sugars, compare the labels of similar products and choose the food with the lowest amount.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- www.fda.gov
- www.choosemyplate.gov
- www.familydoctor.org
- www.heart.org
- www.mayoclinic.com
- www.nutrition.gov