

Understanding Food Labels

What do these claims mean?

Certain food packages make claims that can be confusing to understand. These claims can only be made if they meet strict government definitions and regulations. Here are the label claims and their definitions:

- **Calorie Free:** Less than 5 calories
- **Low Calorie:** 40 calories or less
- **Light or Lite:** 1/3 fewer calories or 50% less fat: if more than half the calories are from fat, fat content must be reduced by 50% or more
- **Light in Sodium:** 50% less sodium
- **Fat Free:** Less than 1/2 gram fat
- **Low Fat:** 3 grams or less fat
- **Cholesterol Free:** Less than 2 milligrams or less saturated fat
- **Low Cholesterol:** 20 milligrams or less cholesterol and 2 grams or less saturated fat
- **Sodium Free:** Less than 5 milligrams sodium
- **Very Low Sodium:** 35 milligrams or less sodium
- **Low Sodium:** 140 milligrams or less sodium
- **High Fiber:** 5 grams or more fiber

Looking at the Ingredients:

Looking at the ingredients on a food label is just as important as looking at the nutritional facts. Here are some tips to consider when looking at the ingredients:

- **First Ingredient:** The first ingredient on the label determines how much of that product, by weight, is in the food.
- **What Does That Say?** For less processed foods, look for ingredient names you can recognize.
- **Too Many:** The more ingredients you see, the more processed the food item can be.
- **Less is More:** The fewer ingredients on the label, the more nutrients and fiber the food contains.

Reading Food Labels

Serving Size: Located at the top of the food label, the information on the rest of the label is based on the serving size. How much you eat is compared to the serving size.

Calories: Based on a single serving, calories explain the amount of calorie energy. A calorie is a measurement of energy in the food you eat. Your body uses food as fuel and "burns" this food for energy.

Total Fat: Fat is an essential nutrient responsible for storing energy in your body. Fat is needed in small amounts. It helps cushion your organs and provides insulation. Fat carries nutrients throughout your body and is a building block for hormones that regulate many developmental functions.

Saturated Fat: This fat can be found in animal and plant based foods. This type of fat is a primary source of high cholesterol.

Trans Fat: This is formed when liquid oils are made to solid fats. However, you can find trans fats in animal based foods. Trans fats consumed in high amounts can contribute to high cholesterol.

Total Carbohydrates: Carbs are your major source of energy for the body. There are two kinds: simple and complex. Simple carbs are sources of quick energy and can be found in milk, fruit, and cookies. Complex carbs take longer to digest and provide energy over a period of time. These can be found in vegetables, rice, pasta and bread. Excessive carbs can lead to obesity and tooth decay.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 4 oz. (113g)
Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

Calories 280 Calories from Fat 130

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 14g 22%

Saturated Fat 3.5g 18%

Trans Fat 2.5g

Cholesterol 120mg 40%

Sodium 640mg 27%

Total Carbohydrate 13g 4%

Dietary Fiber 1g 4%

Sugars 0g

Protein 24g

Vitamin A 2% • Vitamin C 2%

Calcium 2% • Iron 6%

*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	
Saturated Fat	Less Than	20g	25g	
Cholesterol	Less Than	300mg	300 mg	
Sodium	Less Than	2,400mg	2,400mg	
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g	
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g	

Calories per gram:

Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Cholesterol: Waxy fatlike substance that your liver produces for your body. This may not be needed for your diet since your liver naturally produces it. Extra cholesterol can result in fat build up in arteries.

Sodium: This is found in table salt and it is used to preserve food. Sodium helps maintain water balance and is needed for normal nerve function. Excessive levels may lead to elevated blood pressure.

Dietary Fiber: Fiber is a complex carbohydrate that helps aid in digestion by moving food through quickly. Fiber may help prevent colon cancer. Not enough fiber in your diet may result in constipation.

Sugar: Sugars include added and natural sugars. Sugars are high in calories and may cause tooth decay and obesity.

Protein: Proteins are nutrients that are important to build and repair cells in the body. Proteins are made of chains of amino acids. There are 20 different amino acids that combine in different ways to produce different proteins. Essential amino acids must be supplied by the foods you eat because they cannot be produced in the body. Proteins are either complete or incomplete. Complete have all essential amino acids that your body needs. Incomplete proteins lack some amino acids, but you can combine foods to get all the essential amino acids. Lack of protein may result in poor resistance to infection.

% Daily Value: % daily value is based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Vitamins & Minerals: Only two vitamins (A and C) and two minerals (iron and calcium) are required to be on the food label.