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## Healthy Living

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### Front of Package Nutrition Labels

The front label of a package is prime real estate in the nutrition world, so it only makes sense that manufacturers use this highly visible space to tout their nutritional claims. Unfortunately, these claims (such as all-natural, less sugar, lower sodium, etc) are not currently regulated and can be misleading and confusing. The take-home message: Don't let yourself be fooled by a few well-placed and carefully worded claims. Instead, commit to understanding the components of a nutrition label.



### What's in a Label

**Nutrition facts labels** may be confusing and intimidating at first but once you know what to look for, it will be much easier to scan a product and know whether it meets your family's nutritional needs. All labels contain the same basic information.

1. **Serving size**
2. Calorie count
2. Nutrients to limit
3. Nutrients to get enough of
4. A footnote that reveals how much or how little **fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, and fiber** a person should eat based on a 2,000-calorie a day diet.

### The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends these tips when using the nutrition facts label:

- **Make sure you're getting enough** potassium, fiber, **vitamins** A and C, **calcium**, and **iron**.
- **Use the percent daily value** (% DV) column to help determine whether you're getting a little or a lot of a particular component; 5% DV or less is relatively low, 20% DV or more is high.
- **Check servings and calories.** Be sure to look at both the serving size and how many servings the package contains. Remember that the label clearly outlines the nutrients you will get from a single serving. If you eat the servings you eat, remember to double the calories, nutrients, and the percent daily value.
- **Make the calories count.** Look at the calories on the label and note where the calories are coming from. For example, are the calories primarily from fat, or do **protein** and/or carbohydrates add to the total? Compare them with the other nutrients, like vitamins and minerals, to decide whether the food is worth eating.
- **Don't sugar-coat it.** Since sugars contribute calories with few, if any, nutrients, look for foods and beverages low in added sugars. Read the ingredient list and make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few ingredients. Be aware that sugar can often be found hiding on nutrition labels listed as sucrose, glucose, fructose, corn syrup, corn syrup, maple syrup, and fructose.
- **Know your fats.** Look for foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol to help reduce the risk of disease. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Keep total fat in between 20% to 35% of calories.



- **Reduce sodium (salt), increase potassium.** Research shows that eating less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (about 1 teaspoon of salt) per day may reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Contrary to what you might think, most sodium comes in the form of processed foods, not from the salt. Also, look for foods high in potassium (tomatoes, bananas, potatoes, and orange juice, for example), as potassium can help counteract some of sodium's effects on blood pressure.

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