

Counting Calories



How many calories do you need a day? That question is the key to applying the new nutrition label information to your own individual needs.

As part of new food labeling regulations, FDA and the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture have adopted a 2,000-calorie diet as the basis for calculating Daily Reference Values and the percentages of Daily Values that will appear on the label. However, it's important for people to know their *own* calorie needs because DVs for the energy-producing nutrients—fat, carbohydrate, and protein—are based on recommended percentages of a total day's caloric intake.

For example, no more than 30 percent of a day's calories should come from fat, as recommended by public health experts. So if your daily calorie intake is 2,000, you should limit your calories from fat to 600. (Since there are 9 calories per gram of fat, that translates into no more than about 65 grams of fat.)

But not all people need 2,000 calories a day; some need more, some less. Among the factors that have to be considered, according to Virginia Wilkening, a registered dietitian in FDA's Office of Food Labeling, are:

- body size
- age
- height
- weight
- activity level
- metabolism.

A table, such as the one shown here, that takes into consideration some of these factors can give consumers an idea of what their calorie level should be, she said.

"In order for consumers to use some of the percent Daily Value information effectively, they have to have a concept of what their personal caloric intake is," she said.

But, she added, "It's not something that people have to be exact about. It's a ballpark figure. Their calorie intake might be a little higher one day, a little lower the next. The idea is to have a goal in mind."

The information shown here is from the National Academy of Sciences' 1989 Recommended Dietary Allowances. ■

Recommended Energy Intake

Category	Age	Calories Per Day		
		Light Activity	Moderate Activity	Heavy Activity
Children	4-6		1,800	
	7-10		2,000	
Males	11-14		2,500	
	15-18		3,000	
	19-24	2,700	3,000	3,600
	25-50	3,000	3,200	4,000
	51+		2,300*	
Females	11-18		2,200	
	19-24	2,000	2,100	2,600
	25-50	2,200	2,300	2,800
	51+		1,900*	

Pregnant women in their second and third trimesters should add 300 calories to the figure the table indicates for their age. Nursing mothers should add 500.

* based on light to moderate activity

Activity Levels

Very Light: Driving, typing, painting, laboratory work, ironing, sewing, cooking, playing cards, playing a musical instrument, other seated or standing activities

Light: Housecleaning, child care, garage work, electrical trade

work, carpentry, restaurant work, golf, sailing, table tennis, walking on a level surface at 2.5 to 3 miles per hour

Moderate: Weeding, hoeing, carrying a load, cycling, skiing, tennis, dancing, walking 3.5 to 4 miles per hour

Heavy: Heavy manual digging, tree felling, basketball, climbing, football, soccer, carrying a load uphill