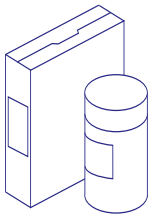
Tips for Using the Food Label



Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label. Here are some tips for reading the label and making smart food choices:

Check servings and calories. Look at the serving size and how many servings you are actually eating.

> **tip:** If you eat 2 servings of a food, you will consume double the calories and double the % Daily Value (% DV) of the nutrients listed on the Nutrition Facts label.

Make your calories count. Look at the calories on the label and compare them with the nutrients they offer.

> **tip:** When you look at a food's nutrition label, first check the calories, and then check the nutrients to decide whether the food is worth eating.

Eat less sugar. Foods with added sugars may provide calories, but few essential nutrients. So, look for foods and beverages low in added sugars. Read the ingredient list, and make sure added sugars are not one of the first few ingredients.

> **tip:** Names for added sugars (caloric sweeteners) include sucrose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, maple syrup, and fructose.

Know your fats. Look for foods low in saturated and *trans* fats, and cholesterol, to help reduce the risk of heart disease. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, such as those in fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.

> **tip:** Fat should be in the range of 20% to 35% of the calories you eat.

Reduce sodium (salt); increase potassium. Research shows that eating less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (about 1 tsp of salt) per day may reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Older adults tend to be salt-sensitive. If you are older adult or salt-sensitive, aim to eat no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium each day—the equivalent of about 3/4 teaspoon. To meet the daily potassium recommendation of at least 4,700 milligrams, consume fruits and vegetables, and fat-free and low-fat milk products that are sources of potassium including: sweet potatoes, beet greens, white potatoes, white beans, plain yogurt, prune juice, and bananas. These counteract some of sodium's effects on blood pressure.

> **tip:** Most sodium you eat is likely to come from processed foods, not from the salt shaker. Read the Nutrition Facts label, and choose foods lower in sodium and higher in potassium.

Use the % Daily Value (% DV) column: 5% DV or less is low, and 20% DV or more is high.

Keep these low: saturated and *trans* fats, cholesterol, and sodium.

Get enough of these: potassium and fiber, vitamins A, C, and D, calcium, and iron.

Check the calories: 400 or more calories per serving of a single food item is high.