

Read Food Labels

Information on food labels can help you choose healthy foods. What do you look for?

Read the “Nutrition Facts.”

A. Look at serving size and how many servings are in the product.

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 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30g	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%

Look at serving size and how many servings are in the product. Serving sizes are given in familiar units, such as cups or pieces. This is followed by the metric amount (e.g., the number of grams). Serving sizes are often based on the amount of food people typically eat.

B. Read calories per serving.

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 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30g	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%

Calories tell you how much energy you get from a serving of this food. The label also tells you how many of the calories in one serving come from fat. In the example, there are 250 calories in a serving of this macaroni and cheese; 110 calories are from fat. This means almost half of the calories come from fat.

More Information

For more information on Food Labeling and Nutrition, contact:

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
www.fda.gov
Search for “Nutrition Facts.”

C. Look at the nutrients per serving.

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)		
Servings Per Container 2		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories 250		Calories from Fat 110
		% Daily Value*
Limit These Nutrients	Total Fat 12g	18%
	Saturated Fat 3g	15%
	Trans Fat 1.5g	
	Cholesterol 30g	10%
	Sodium 470mg	20%
Get Enough of These	Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
	Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
	Sugars 5g	
	Protein 5g	
	Vitamin A	4%
	Vitamin C	2%
	Calcium	20%
	Iron	4%

The nutrients listed first are the ones people eat enough, or too much of. Eating too much saturated and *trans* fats or too much sodium may increase your risk of heart disease, some cancers, and high blood pressure.

Most people don't get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions. For example, getting enough calcium can reduce the risk of osteoporosis, in which bones become brittle and break as one ages.

D. Look at Percent Daily Value (% DV).

Look for
low
%DV
from
these
nutrients

Look -
for high
%DV
from
these
nutrients

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	1.5g	
Cholesterol	30g	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%

Daily Values (DVs) are a way to tell if a food is high or low in nutrients. In general 5% DV or less is low in a nutrient; 20% or more is high in a nutrient.

The Percent Daily Value (%DV) on food labels is based on a 2000 calorie diet. This means that they are not exact for what Daily Values are for 1200-1300, 1500-1600, and 1800 calorie diets. So, use food label %DVs as a general guide to see if a food gives any nutrients for the calories it has. If you want to be more exact, use the guidelines in the chart that follows.

Quick Tip

In general, look for foods that have low %DV for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Balance foods that have 20% or more of these with ones that have 5% DV or less.

In general, look for foods that have 20% or more for fiber and/or at least one of the vitamins and iron or other minerals that can be listed.

Daily Reference Values (DRVs) for Different Calorie Levels			
Nutrient	1200-1300 Calories	1500-1600 Calories	1800 Calories
Total fat	40-43 grams (maximum/day)	50-53 grams (maximum/day)	60 grams (maximum/day)
Sat. and <i>trans</i> fats	13.3-14.4 grams (maximum/day)	16.6-17.7 grams (maximum/day)	20 grams (maximum/day)
Carbo- hydrate	180-195 grams (maximum/day)	225-240 grams (maximum/day)	270 grams (maximum/day)
Protein	30-32.5 grams (minimum/day)	37.5-40 grams (minimum/day)	45 grams (minimum/day)
Fiber*	14-15grams (minimum/day)	17-18 grams (minimum/day)	20 grams (minimum/day)

{**Note:** Many health organizations advise 20 to 35 grams of dietary fiber per day, regardless of calorie intake. Check with your doctor about your fiber needs.} To get adequate dietary fiber on reduced calorie eating plans, choose whole-grain breads and cereals over refined ones.

Read food labels for dietary fiber. This macaroni and cheese product has no fiber. Remember that dietary fiber is found in plant foods. You could add fiber to this food by adding tomatoes and chopped green peppers.

Compare Nutrition Facts for Three Cereals

Nutrition Facts	Wheat Squares Sweetened	Corn Flakes Not Sweetened	Mixed Grain Flakes Sweetened
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	(35g)	(19g)	(27g)
Serving Per Container	1	1	1
Amount Per Serving			
Calories	120	70	100
Calories from Fat	0	0	0
	% Daily Value*	% Daily Value*	% Daily Value*
Total Fat	0g 0%	0g 0%	0g 0%
Saturated Fat	0g 0%	0g 0%	0g 0%
Trans Fat	0g	0g	0g
Cholesterol	0mg 0%	0mg 0%	0mg 0%
Sodium	0mg 0%	200mg 8%	120mg 5%
Potassium	125mg 4%	25mg 1%	30mg 1%
Total Carbohydrate	29g 10%	17g 6%	24g 8%
Dietary Fiber	3g 12%	1g 4%	1g 4%
Sugars	8g	6g	13g
Protein	4g	1g	1g

After comparing these three labels, which cereal would you choose?

One advantage for all three is that they are a set portion (a small box that is one serving size). Overall, the wheat squares may be the best choice based on the nutrients you get for the calories it has. It would even be better to choose wheat squares that are not sweetened. The same serving size would have less added sugar and calories. Corn flakes is also a good choice. One serving has 70 calories. This is close to the amount of calories in 1 serving of grains & starches (80 calories).

Can These Meals Be Part of a Healthy Daily Diet?

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Pizza (198g)	
Serving Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 530	Calories from Fat 240
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 27g	42%
Saturated Fat 10g	50%
Cholesterol 50g	17%
Sodium 1,090mg	45%
Total Carbohydrate 50g	17%
Dietary Fiber 4g	17%
Sugars 6g	
Protein 24g	
Vitamin A	
Vitamin A	35%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	50%
Iron	8%

Four Cheese Pizza: This choice is harder to fit into a healthy diet. One serving (the whole pizza) uses 50% of a daily saturated fat allowance, leaving only 50% for all other foods and drinks that day.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Pizza (186g)	
Serving Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 380	Calories from Fat 100
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 11g	17%
Saturated Fat 3.5g	18%
Cholesterol 40g	13%
Sodium 550mg	23%
Total Carbohydrate 47g	16%
Dietary Fiber 6g	24%
Sugars 4g	
Protein 23g	
Vitamin A	
Vitamin A	15%
Vitamin C	8%
Calcium	50%
Iron	20%

Deluxe Combo Pizza: This meal is easier to fit into a healthy diet. One serving (the whole pizza), gives 18% of a daily saturated fat allowance. This leaves 82% for all other foods and drinks that day.

Read the Label

Besides looking at saturated fat, of the two choices, the Deluxe Combo Pizza has more dietary fiber (6g) and less sodium (550mg).

Is this a Healthy Snack Food? Read the label.

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 package		
Serving Per Container 1		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories	250	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value		
Total Fat	12g	19%
Saturated Fat	2g	10%
Trans Fat	0g	**
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	310mg	13%
Total Carbohydrate	30g	10%
Dietary Fiber	2g	9%
Sugars	2g	
Protein	5g	
Vitamin A 6%	•	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 6%	•	Iron 4%
Vitamin E 6%	•	Thiamin 2%
Riboflavin 2%	•	Niacin 2%
Vitamin B ₆ 6%	•	Phosphorus 10%



INGREDIENTS: CORN, VEGETABLE OIL, (CONTAINS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING: CORN, SOYBEAN, OR SUNFLOWER OIL), CHEDDAR CHEESE (CULTURED MILK, SALT, ENZYMES), TOMATO POWDER, WHEY, LACTOSE, MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE, ONION POWDER, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN AND COTTONSEED OIL, BUTTERMILK SOLIDS, ROMANO CHEESE FROM COW'S MILK (CULTURED MILK, SALT, ENZYMES), SUGAR, SODIUM DIACETATE, CORN STARCH, WHEY PROTEIN CONCENTRATE, CORN SYRUP SOLIDS, NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR (INCLUDING NATURAL LIME FLAVOR AND NATURAL JALAPENO FLAVOR), FRUCTOSE, MALTODEXTRIN, SPICES, SODIUM CASEINATE, GARLIC POWDER, DISODIUM PHOSPHATE, CITRIC ACID, ARTIFICIAL COLOR (INCLUDING RED 40 LAKE, YELLOW 6, YELLOW 6 LAKE, YELLOW 5 LAKE, BLUE 1, RED 40), MALIC ACID, LIME JUICE SOLIDS, LACTIC ACID, DEXTROSE, DISODIUM INOSINATE, DISODIUM GUANYLATE, SODIUM CITRATE, AND CARRAGEENIN.

Answer: The good thing about this snack food is that it does not have *trans* fat. This is because it has vegetable oil, not “hydrogenated” vegetable oil. It does, though, have 250 calories and 12 grams of fat. That is a lot for a snack. Eat foods like this less often. Make 2 or 3 servings out of this individual snack bag, too.

Ingredient List

This lists what’s in the food from most to least by weight. There is more of the first ingredient than the second and so on. Choose foods that list acceptable ingredients first, second, and third.

Also, check the list for ingredients that you may be allergic or sensitive to, such as milk, eggs, peanuts, and wheat.

Preparation Instructions

Look at the instructions on package directions. You can change the way the food is prepared to lower total fat, saturated fat, and sodium, as well as to increase nutrients, such as fiber and vitamin C.

Sample Macaroni and Cheese Box	
Directions:	Changes You Can Make:
Add macaroni and 1 tsp. salt to 6 cups boiling water, stirring occasionally 7 to 10 minutes or to desired tenderness.	Omit the salt. This will decrease the amount of sodium per serving.
Add ¼ cup margarine and ¼ cup milk and the cheese sauce, then mix well.	Add half of the margarine (2 Tbsp.) or substitute diet margarine and skim milk. This will lower the fat content by more than half per serving.
Makes 3 cups.	Add chopped green pepper and tomato pieces or garnish with tomatoes, peppers, etc. This will increase dietary fiber and vitamin C and add color.

Open Dating

Look at this so you won't buy food items that are spoiled or will spoil before you use them. Buy them before "sell by" or "expiration date," which is the last date the product should be used.



Add vegetables to dishes or garnish the plate with vegetables to increase nutrients and add color.