What Food Labels Tell Us

A Counseling Tool For Health Professionals
Dear Health Professional:

As a health professional, you are aware that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture regulate the nutrition information that appears on food labels. While consumers are able to use this information to compare products, there is still confusion about how to apply this information when selecting foods to create a balanced diet.

To assist you in counseling your clients, Conagra Brands® offers this tool to use in food label education sessions. This tool provides examples to help your clients:

- Recognize nutrients, symbols or wording on food labels, including
  - Nutrition Facts
  - Nutrient Descriptions
- Compare food label information to their own nutritional needs
  - Calories
  - Serving Sizes
  - Percent Daily Values (DV)
  - Allergen Information
- Find preparation and storage instructions for food safety and quality
  - Use by Dates,
  - Storage Information
  - Cooking Instructions.

These labels represent what can be found on Conagra Brands® packages. Because we routinely review and update our nutrition labels, please remind your clients to always check the labels of the foods they purchase for the most up-to-date information.

The Registered Dietitian Nutritionists at Conagra Brands® welcome your comments about this counseling tool as well as suggestions for other educational materials that would be helpful in your practice. Contact us at www.ConagraNutrition.com

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The Food Label Can Help You Make Informed Choices

The front of package labels are intended to convey important information quickly. For example, specific claims can help you make quick decisions related to your specific nutritional goals.

**Nutrition and Health Claim statement examples:**
- Excellent source of protein
- 0g Trans Fat per serving
- Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease

**Ingredient statement claim examples:**
- 100% Whole Grain Popcorn
- Made with Canola Oil

**Handling statement examples:**
- Keep Frozen
- Must Be Cooked Thoroughly
- Must Be Kept Refrigerated to Maintain Safety
Symbols and Graphics
These symbols or graphics may appear on either the front or back of food labels.

Facts Up Front
A nutrient-based volunteer labeling system that displays information from the Nutrition Facts Panel on the front of food and beverage packages. (www.factsupfront.org)

Inspection Marks on Processed Foods
The USDA inspection symbol identifies meats, poultry and eggs packaged in a facility inspected by the agency to ensure that meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

Kosher
The word 'Kosher' when applied to food means the item is fit for consumption according to Jewish Dietary Law. The laws of kosher are overseen and interpreted by Rabbinical Organizations. A kosher symbol present on the packaging indicates which Rabbinical Organization certifies the food as well as its kosher status.

Examples include:
- K appears on Kosher Pareve foods, meaning they contain neither meat nor milk
- K MEAT appears on Kosher Meats
- K D appears on Kosher Dairy foods

Quantity in Weight, Measure or Count
The amount of product contained in the package. Quantity information is declared in both common household measures and in metric units.
For example: 1 gallon (3.78L)
- Net Wt. 14.5 oz (411g)
- Net Wt. 10.7 oz (303g)

Optimal Product Quality
A date on the package indicates the timeframe to use the food.
For example: Best if used by (date) is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date. Use by (date) is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. This date is determined by the manufacturer.
Nutrient and food descriptions used on food labels are regulated by the government. These descriptors can only be used if a food meets strict government definitions and are based on the Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed (RACC).

**Nutrient Content Claims**

“Free,” “low” or “reduced” claims may appear on package fronts and may mean the food is low or reduced in certain nutrients such as calories, fat, saturated fat or sodium.

“Good source” and “high” claims may appear on the package front and may mean the food contains significant amounts of dietary fiber, vitamins or minerals. ‘Good” means 10-19% of the DV per RACC of the nutrient is present. “High” means 20% or more of the DV per RACC is present.

**Health Claims**

A health claim is a statement that describes the relationship between a food or food component and a disease or health-related condition. To make a health claim, the food must meet certain nutrient limits. The government has authorized several health claims. An example of a health claim specific to sodium and hypertension is: “Diets low in sodium may reduce the risk for high blood pressure, a disease associated with many factors.”

**What Makes a Food “Healthy?”**

The term “healthy” is defined by federal regulations and can be used to describe a food that meets specific nutrition criteria. A serving of the food must be limited in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium, and contain minimum amounts of vitamins, minerals or other beneficial nutrients. The regulations on the use of the word “healthy” vary depending on whether the food is a meal, main dish or an individual food.

Some highlights of the Federal regulation are listed below:

- Meal (≥10 oz.), main dishes (≥6 oz.) and individual foods must be low in saturated fat. Recent guidance by FDA allows foods to qualify without being low in total fat, if monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats comprise the majority of fat.
- Cholesterol must be ≤ 90 mg for meals and main dishes and ≤60 mg for individual foods.
- Sodium must be ≤600 mg for meals and main dishes and ≤480 mg for individual foods.
- Combinations of beneficial nutrients (3 required for meals, 2 for main dish and 1 for individual foods) need to be ≥10% DV of fiber, calcium, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron and protein. Vitamin D and potassium were recently added to this list.
Understanding the Ingredient Statement

Recipes for packaged foods are similar to recipes you make at home. However, ingredient statements on packages become more lengthy than home recipes due to requirements by the USDA and FDA to report the ingredients down to the most basic components. As shown in this example, the ingredients used to make pasta and cheese are listed, whereas in a home recipe these would be listed as one ingredient. Full disclosure of ingredients provides transparency and helps consumers make informed decisions.

Additional Ingredient Information Resources
- Understanding Common Food Ingredients. 2014. www.FoodInsight.org
Changes to the Nutrition Facts Panel

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has finalized a new Nutrition Facts label for packaged foods that will make it easier for you to make informed food choices that support a healthy diet. The updated label has a fresh new design and reflects current scientific information, including the link between diet and chronic diseases.

1. Servings

The number of "servings per container" and the "Serving Size" declaration have increased and are now in larger and/or bolder type. Serving sizes have been updated to reflect what people actually eat and drink today. For example, the serving size for ice cream was previously 1/2 cup and now is 2/3 cup.

There are also new requirements for certain size packages, such as those that are between one and two servings or are larger than a single serving but could be consumed in one or multiple sittings.

2. Calories

"Calories" is now larger and bolder.

3. Fats

"Calories from Fat" has been removed because research shows the type of fat consumed is more important than the amount.

4. Added Sugars

"Added Sugars" in grams and as a percent Daily Value (%DV) is now required on the label. "Added Sugars" include sugars that have been added during the processing or packaging of a food. Scientific data shows that it is difficult to meet nutrient needs while staying within calorie limits if you consume more than 10 percent of your total daily calories from added sugar.

5. Nutrients

The lists of nutrients that are required or permitted on the label have been updated. Vitamin D and potassium are now required on the label because Americans do not always get the recommended amounts. Vitamins A and C are no longer required since deficiencies of these vitamins are rare today. The actual amount (in milligrams or micrograms) in addition to the %DV must be listed for vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium.

The daily values for nutrients have also been updated based on newer scientific evidence. The daily values are reference amounts of nutrients to consume or not to exceed and are used to assess the %DV.

6. Footnote

The footnote at the bottom of the label has changed to better explain the meaning of %DV. The %DV helps you understand the nutrition information in the context of a total daily diet.

Manufacturers will need to use the new label by July 26, 2018, and small businesses will have an additional year to comply. During this transition time, you will see the current Nutrition Facts label or the new label on products.
The updated Nutrition Facts Panel introduces several ways for nutritional information to be displayed.

The following examples show the current label and the new types of labels you may encounter.
The Changing Nutrition Facts Panel

Previous

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1/2 cup (121g)
Serving Per Container about 0.5
Amount Per Serving
Calories 0 Calories from Fat 0%
Total Fat 0g 0%
Saturated Fat 0g 0%
Trans Fat 0g 0%
Cholesterol 0mg 0%
Sodium 0mg 0%
Potassium 0mg 0%
Total Carbohydrate 0g 0%
Dietary Fiber 0g 0%
Sugars 0g 0%
Protein 0g 0%
Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0% • Iron 0%
Vitamin E 0% • Manganese 0%

INGREDIENTS: TOMATOES, TOMATO JUICE, LESS THAN 2% OF: CALCIUM CHLORIDE, CITRIC ACID.

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GLUTEN FREE FOOD

New

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size about 3.5 servings per container
Serving Per Container 1/2 cup (121g)
Amount per Serving
Calories 30
Total Fat 0g 0%
Sodium 15mg 1%
Total Carbohydrate 0g 0%
Dietary Fiber 0g 0%
Total Sugars 0g 0%
Protein 1g 0%
Calcium 0% • Iron 0%
Potas. 230mg 4% • Vitamin C 15%

INGREDIENTS: DICED TOMATOES, TOMATO JUICE, LESS THAN 2% OF: CITRIC ACID, CALCIUM CHLORIDE.

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Understanding Serving Sizes

• Serving sizes are based on guidelines provided by the FDA that reflect how much Americans’ typically eat. On package labels, serving sizes are required to be listed by weight, then by household measure for easier understanding.

• To help people know how much they would eat if they consumed the whole package, changes are being made to the nutrition facts panel for smaller packages:
  
  • Small packages previously labeled as containing between 1 and 2 servings will now be considered a single-serving container and nutrition facts will be reported for the entire container.

  • For packages containing 2-3 servings, these labels will now show nutrition facts per serving and per container. (See following example.)
Popcorn Dual Column Panel

FDA has specific guidance for popcorn labeling.

- Dual column displays popcorn per full serving popcorn as well as per cup popped.

Look for the smartlabel™ icon for more detailed information about the food.
Simple Nutrition Facts Design

The Abbreviated Label

• For foods that contain near zero amounts of nutrients, additional lines are not required.

• Instead, label must add “Not a significant source of…”

• Creates a simpler label.