What's on a Food Label?

Participant Guide

Julie A. Albrecht, Extension Food Specialist

Food labels help consumers make purchasing decisions and provide information about the product. An attractive label initially helps sell the product to the consumer and gives the consumer information about the product identity, quality, nutrition, and relevant health and safety information.

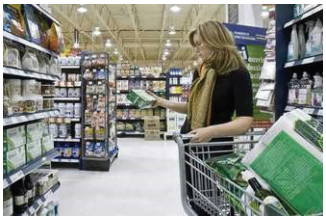


Fig. 01

Fig. 02

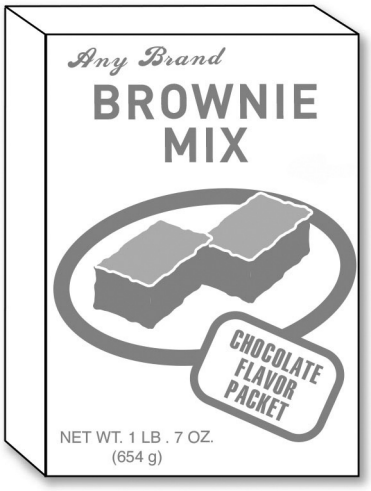


Fig. 03

Let's take a look at a food label to see what information it contains.

Five pieces of information are required on all food labels:

- a statement of identity
- a net weight of contents statement
- an ingredient statement
- a statement that gives the name and place of business of the product's manufacturer, packer, or distributor
- the Nutrition Facts label

Statement of Identity

This statement describes the product and preferably the common name of the food. A unique or fanciful name may be used if no common name exists as long as the name describes the product so the consumer knows what is in the product.

Net Weight of Contents Statement

The edible product in the container is listed by weight, volume, or numerical count depending on the product. The weight and volume must be listed in both English and metric units.

Ingredients Statement

The list of ingredients in the product is listed below the Nutrition Facts panel. The ingredients are listed by their common or usual name in descending order by weight. For example: If whole grain rolled oats is listed first, that ingredient has the largest amount of weight in the product. The ingredient listed last contributes the least amount by weight. Ingredients containing an allergen may be listed in the ingredient statement in parenthesis. Example: whey protein (milk).

Consumers can use this list to find out if the product contains ingredients that are sources of nutrients they want to get more (whole grains) or less of (saturated fats like shortening or added sugar like syrups).

Below the ingredient list, a statement may be added that identifies the ingredients that are allergens in the food product. Example: Contains Almond, Milk, and Soy ingredients.

Fig. 04

Name and Place of Business

This statement provides the food product's manufacturer, packer, or distributor. It may consist of a business name, city, and zip code if the address can be found in a public directory under the business name. Otherwise the complete address must be given.

Nutrition Facts Label

The Nutrition Facts label has been on packages since 1992. This label needs updating to help consumers use the information to make decisions about the food they eat. By 2018 most food products will have the new Nutrition Facts label.

Changes include increasing the type size for "Calories," "Servings per Container," and the "Serving Size" declaration, and bolding the number of calories and the serving size declaration.

What is a serving? **Serving sizes** will be more realistic to reflect how much people typically eat at one time. Serving sizes must be based on the amount of the food or beverage that people actually eat, not what they should eat. The information that follows is based on the serving size given for the food.

Calories is the amount of energy consumers will get from a serving of the food. On the new label, Calories are in a bold and larger type. Calories from fat will not be listed on the new label.

The **% Daily Value** helps consumers determine what nutrients are in the food product and if a nutrient is high, or low. If the nutrient is 20% or more of a product, it is high; 5% or less of a nutrient is low. The % Daily Value is based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

The daily values have been updated based on the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines.

Fig. 05

Total Fat is the amount of fat in one serving of the food. Saturated fat is listed but not unsaturated fat, polyunsaturated fat, and monounsaturated fat. A person should consume less than 10% of his or her calories from fat or less than 65 grams of total fat per day (based on a 2,000 calorie diet) and 20 grams of saturated fat per day. Added **trans fat** from hydrogenated oils will be reduced, but not eliminated, from foods. Naturally occurring trans fat will still exist in foods and will continue to be listed on the label. Cholesterol is found in animal products, and the FDA recommends that a person should consume less than 300 mg of cholesterol from food per day.

The **Sodium** recommendation remains the same. A person should consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. That is the amount of sodium in 1 teaspoon of salt.

Added Sugars is a new addition to the label and listed under carbohydrates. Added sugars include sugars that are added during processing of foods. These sugars include free sugar monosaccharides, disaccharides, sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juice that are in excess of what would be expected from a

Fig. 06

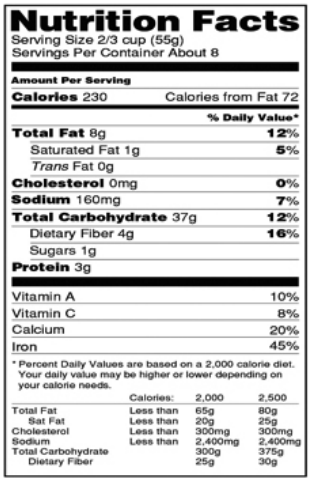


Fig. 07. Original Nutrition Facts Label

Fig. 08. New Nutrition Facts Label

comparable 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend reducing caloric intake from foods with added sugar. Americans average 13% of their calories from added sugars, and the Dietary Guidelines recommend only 10% of calories from added sugars (200 calories per day). Sources of added sugars are sugar-sweetened beverages (soft drinks, fruit drinks, coffee, tea, sport and energy drinks, and alcohol) and snacks (grain-based desserts, dairy desserts, candies, jams, syrups, and sweet toppings).

Dietary Fiber information remains the same on the label. Dietary fiber occurs naturally in plants and is added to different foods. Dietary fiber may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. The recommendation is that women should include 25 g of dietary fiber per day and 38 g per day for men.

Changes in nutrients required on the label were made because vitamin D and potassium are nutrients that most Americans do not get enough of in their diet. Vitamin D is important in bone health, and potassium helps to lower blood pressure. Calcium and iron will remain on the label. Vitamins A and C have been removed because deficiencies in these vitamins are rare in the United States. Food manufacturers can list these vitamins voluntarily.

The footnote at the bottom of the label better explains what the percent Daily Value means.

What Is Different on the New Label?

Below is a comparison of the current Nutrition Facts label and the new Nutrition Facts Label.

Allergen Labeling

Allergen labeling is required if a food product contains one of these eight allergens: eggs, milk, wheat, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, and crustacean shellfish. The type of tree nut, the type of fish, and the type of shellfish must be listed. The allergens can be identified on the label in two ways: Either within the ingredient label or a statement below the ingredient statement that states "Contains . . . (the allergen)."

Nutrient Content Claims

Various terms have been used to describe nutrients in foods. When used on food labels, these terms have a consistent meaning. Approved definitions are:

- Calorie free: less than 5 calories per serving
- Reduced calorie: at least 25% fewer calories than regular version
- Low calorie: 40 calories or less per serving
- Fat free (trans or saturated): less than 0.5 grams fat per serving
- Reduced fat: at least 25% less fat than regular version
- Low fat: 3 grams or less of fat per serving
- Sugar free: less than 0.5 grams of sugar per serving
- Reduced sugar: at least 25% less sugar than regular version

- No added sugar: no sugars added during processing or packing, including ingredients that contain sugar such as juice or dry fruit
- Sodium free: less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
- Reduced sodium: at least 25% less sodium than regular version
- Low sodium: 140 mg or less sodium per serving
- Light/Lite: one-third fewer calories or 50% less fat than regular version
- High, rich in, excellent source of: 20% or more of Daily Value
- Good source of, contains, provides: 10% to 19% of Daily Value
- More, enriched, fortified, added: 10% or more of Daily Value

Health Claims

A Health Claim describes a relationship between a food, food component, or dietary supplement and a reduced risk for a specific disease or health-related condition. Health Claims are based on extensive scientific literature, which demonstrates the relationship between the food and health condition. Approved Health Claims are:

Qualified Health Claims About Atopic Dermatitis Risk

- 100% Whey-Protein Partially Hydrolyzed Infant Formula and Reduced Risk of Atopic Dermatitis

Qualified Claims About Cancer Risk

- Tomatoes and/or Tomato Sauce and Prostate, Ovarian, Gastric, and Pancreatic Cancers
- Calcium and Colon/Rectal Cancer and Calcium and Recurrent Colon/Rectal Polyps
- Green Tea and Cancer
- Selenium and Cancer
- Antioxidant Vitamins and Cancer

Qualified Claims About Cardiovascular Disease Risk

- Nuts and Heart Disease
- Walnuts and Heart Disease
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Coronary Heart Disease
- B Vitamins and Vascular Disease
- Monounsaturated Fatty Acids from Olive Oil and Coronary Heart Disease
- Unsaturated Fatty Acids from Canola Oil and Coronary Heart Disease
- Corn Oil and Heart Disease

Qualified Claims About Cognitive Function

- Phosphatidylserine and Cognitive Dysfunction and Dementia

Qualified Claims About Diabetes

- Psyllium Husk and Diabetes
- Chromium Picolinate and Diabetes

Qualified Claims About Hypertension

- Calcium and Hypertension, Pregnancy-Induced Hypertension, and Preeclampsia

Qualified Claims About Neural Tube Birth Defects

- 0.8 mg Folic Acid and Neural Tube Birth Defects

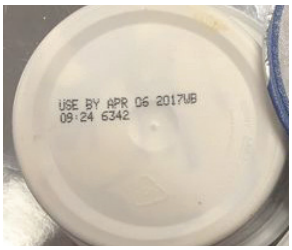
Structure/function claims may describe the role of a nutrient or dietary ingredient intended to affect the normal structure or function of the human body, for example, "calcium builds strong bones." The manufacturer cannot list any disease in this statement.

Gluten Free Labeling

In 2014, "gluten free," "without gluten," "free of gluten," and "no gluten" were defined by FDA. Previously when these terms were used, the consumer could not be sure that the product did not contain gluten. Now foods labeled with these terms cannot contain an ingredient that is any type of wheat, rye, barley, or crossbreeds of these grains or an ingredient derived from these grains without a processing step to remove gluten.

Healthy

In 2016, FDA proposed that the term "Healthy" have a standard definition. Food manufacturers can use the term if their product is not low in total fat but has a fat profile made of mostly mono and polyunsaturated fats OR contains at least 10% of the Daily Value of potassium or vitamin D.



Figs. 09, 10, 11

Natural

Currently the term "Natural" does not have a definition, but FDA is considering a standard definition for Natural.

Imported Foods—Country of Origin Labeling

Imported foods must comply with U.S. labeling requirements and must state the country of origin on the label if they were not processed in the U.S.

Restaurant Labeling

By 2017, nutrition labeling (calories) will be required for menu/food items and menu boards for many restaurants, retail food establishments, and vending machines. Written nutrition information about total calories, total fat, calories from fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, fiber, sugars, and protein is required for consumers who request it.

What Do the Dates on Labels mean?

Open dating is a date that is stamped on food to help the store determine how long to display the product for sale. Consumers can use these dates to know how long the product will be at its best quality. **Open dates are not food safety dates.**

Dating is not required on food products in the United States except infant formula. A standard dating system is not in place and a number of terms are used on food labels.

A "**Sell By" date** lets the store know how long to display the product for sale. Consumers should buy the food product before this date.

A **"Best if Used by" or "Before"** date is used on food products to let consumers know when the best flavor or quality of the product will be. This date is not a purchase or safety date.

A **"Use By"** date (or expiration date) is the last date recommended for the use of the food product while it is at peak quality. The date is determined by the food manufacturer through its shelf life tests. "Use By" dates usually refer to best quality and are not food safety dates. Since infant formula is required to have a "Use By" date, do not purchase formula that is past this date. Proper handling, storage, preparation, and use are listed on infant formula products.

After the date passes for food other than infant formula, the product may not be the best quality but it should be safe, wholesome, and of good quality **if handled properly**. Refrigerated foods should be safe if they have been handled properly and **stored at 400F or below**. See the chart for proper storage times.

Foods can develop an off odor, flavor, or appearance due to spoilage bacteria. These foods should be discarded. An example would be leaving milk at room temperature for more than two hours and the milk sours before the "Use By" date.

If foods are not properly handled or stored correctly, foodborne bacteria can grow in the food even if the date is in the future. An example would be taking hot dogs or luncheon meat to a picnic and leaving it out for more than two hours. The food is not safe. Bacteria can grow in the food and cause foodborne illness. Other examples of improper food handling are thawing food at room temperature, cross contamination, and not washing hands when handling food. Always follow package instructions for a safe and high quality product.

Canned Foods

Cans have a packing code on the product that helps with a product recall and manufacturer storage of the product. These codes do not convey any information to the consumer. Some canned foods do have an open date, usually a "Best if Used by" date, which indicates peak quality of the product. As long as canned foods are not exposed to freezing temperatures or temperatures above 90F and the cans are not dented, rusted, or swollen, they are safe to eat. Cans that are dented, rusted, or swollen should be discarded. High-acid canned foods such as tomatoes and fruits will keep their peak quality for 12 to 18 months; low-acid foods such as meats, vegetables, and mixed foods for two to five years if stored in a cool dark place.

Refrigerator Storage of Fresh or Uncooked Products

Product	Storage Times After Purchase
Poultry	1 or 2 days
Beef, Veal, Pork, and Lamb	3 to 5 days
Ground Meat and Ground Poultry	1 or 2 days
Fresh Variety Meats (Liver, Tongue, Brain, Kidneys, Heart, Chitterlings)	1 or 2 days
Cured Ham, Cook-Before-Eating	5 to 7 days
Sausage from Pork, Beef, or Turkey, Uncooked	1 or 2 days
Eggs	3 to 5 weeks

Refrigerator Storage of Processed Products Sealed at Food Processing Facility

Processed Product	Unopened, After Purchase	After Opening
Cooked Poultry	3 to 4 days	3 to 4 days
Cooked Sausage	3 to 4 days	3 to 4 days
Sausage, Hard/Dry, shelf stable	6 weeks/pantry	3 weeks
Corned Beef, uncooked, in pouch with pickling juices	5 to 7 days	3 to 4 days
Vacuum-packed Dinners, commercial brand with USDA seal	2 weeks	3 to 4 days
Bacon	2 weeks	7 days
Hot Dogs	2 weeks	1 week
Luncheon Meat	2 weeks	3 to 5 days
Ham, fully cooked	7 days	slices, 3 days; whole, 7 days
Ham, canned, labeled "keep refrigerated"	9 months	3 to 4 days
Ham, canned, shelf stable	2 years/pantry	3 to 5 days
Canned Meat and Poultry, shelf stable	2 to 5 years/pantry	3 to 4 days

Dates on Egg Cartons

The date on egg cartons is either a "Sell By" or "Use By" date. The date cannot be more than 45 days from the packing date of the eggs. Eggs should always be purchased before the "Sell By" or "Use By" date. Consumers should refrigerate the eggs in their original carton as soon as possible after purchasing them. They should be placed in the coldest part of the refrigerator, not the door. For best quality, the eggs should be used within three to five weeks after the date when purchased. The date on the carton may have passed but the eggs are safe to use.

FoodKeeper

A FoodKeeper app is available to provide consumers with information about food storage. Check the website for the availability in iPhone and Android formats: http://blogs.usda.gov/2015/04/02/new-usda-foodkeeper-app-your-new-tool-for-smart-food-storage/

Resources

FDA. 2016. How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label.http://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/LabelingNutrition/ucm274593.htm

FDA. 2016. "Natural" on Food Labeling. http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/LabelingNutrition/ucm456090.htm

FDA. 2016. Label Claims for Conventional Foods and Dietary Supplements. http://www.fda.gov/food/ingredientspackaginglabeling/labelingnutrition/ucm111447.htm

FDA. 2016. Nutrition Labeling Information for Restaurants & Retail Establishments. http://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/LabelingNutrition/ucm459729.htm

FSIS/USDA. 2015. Food Product Dating. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/food-product-dating/food-product-dating

McGlynn, W. 2016. Food Labeling Basics. Food Quality and Safety. 23(4): 29–30.

USDA. 2015. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015–2020 Eighth Edition. https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/2015–2020-dietary-guidelines-americans or https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/resources/2015–2020_Dietary_Guidelines.pdf

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