Nutrition Facts Labels

Most packaged food has a Nutrition Facts Panel that lists the nutrients that food contains. This information can tell you how much energy (calories) is in the food and what other nutrients it contains.

Serving Size
This is important to pay attention to, because the rest of the label shows the amounts in one serving. If you’re eating more or less than one serving, you’ll have to multiply the stated nutrients by the servings you’re eating. For instance, if calories per serving = 250, but you’re eating 2 servings, that means you’re really eating 500 calories!

Calories
Calories are a measure of the energy that the food gives you. Consuming more calories than your body uses can cause weight gain, while consuming fewer calories than your body uses can lead to weight loss. Generally, products that have more than 400 calories per serving are high-calorie foods, and should be limited in your diet. Products with less than 40 calories per serving are low-calorie foods. Look for foods that have high vitamins & minerals with lower calories per serving for optimum health.
The 5-20 Rule

When reading a nutrition label, look for the nutrients that are under 5% or over 20% of your daily needs:

5% Daily Value (DV) or less is low. Choose foods with a low % of salt, sugars, and fats. Nutrients to get less of are saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars. While small amounts of fat & sodium are needed, too much is bad for health.

20% Daily Value (DV) or more is high. Choose foods with a high % of vitamins & minerals. Nutrients to get more of are fiber, vitamins A & C, calcium, potassium, and iron. Vitamins & minerals are generally listed together at the bottom of the label, under the dividing line.

Am I getting enough?

If you don’t get 100% of a certain nutrient in your daily diet, or eat too much of another nutrient, don’t worry too much. Make sure to vary the foods you eat throughout the week, adding lots of fruits & vegetables to get vitamins and minerals without adding extra calories. Try to limit “empty calories” from your diet: these are any foods with high levels of calories and sodium, but low levels of vitamins and minerals.