



Reading a Nutrition Facts Label

What You Need to Know!

Reading nutrition labels can be confusing, especially when trying to choose the healthiest products for you and your family. To be an informed consumer, you must also read the ingredients list. While the best choice is always real, whole foods like fruits and vegetables that don't come with nutrition labels, avoiding packaged foods entirely is unrealistic. Remember, the quality of the ingredients matters a lot.

Here's what to look for when reading the nutrition facts label on packaged food:



- 1 Order of ingredients:** The first item listed is the most abundant, and the last is the least. However, food companies can be tricky. To avoid listing sugar as the first or second ingredient, they might use multiple types of sugar in smaller amounts, moving them further down the list. Often, these sugars are listed under names you might not recognize. Buyer beware!
- 2 Unrecognizable ingredients:** If you can't pronounce it or wouldn't find it in your kitchen, it's likely a chemical and should be avoided.
- 3 Number of ingredients:** Choose foods with fewer ingredients, ideally five or fewer, but no more than ten.
- 4 Natural flavors:** This term is misleading as these can include up to 100 GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe) ingredients that are often not tested. According to food activist Vani Hari, "Flavors typically contain preservatives, emulsifiers, solvents, and other 'incidental additives,' making up about 80% of the formulation." Avoid these products whenever possible.
- 5 Artificial flavors:** These are often chemical-laden flavor enhancers that can make you sick and gain weight. Avoid them.
- 6 Protein:** Protein helps you feel full and stabilizes blood sugar and insulin. Look for foods with high protein to keep you satisfied longer.
- 7 Net carbs:** Calculate net carbs by subtracting the grams of fiber from the total grams of carbohydrates. Lower net carbs are a better choice.
- 8 Serving size:** This can be misleading, as food companies often base nutrition facts on unrealistic serving sizes. One package or bottled beverage might not equal one serving. Always check the serving size and measure it out to understand how much of each nutrient you are consuming.