

Label Reading the Healthy Way

Using food labels

Food labels give you information to help you compare similar foods and make healthier choices.

Nutrition information is found in 3 different places on food labels:

- Ingredient list
- Nutrition Facts table
- Nutrient content claims and health claims

What about foods without a label?

It is the law in Canada that most foods have a label.

Foods that **don't** need a label are:

- fresh vegetables and fruit
- raw meat and poultry (ground meat and ground poultry must have labels)
- raw fish and seafood
- pre-packaged meat and poultry barbecued, roasted, or broiled in the store
- baked goods made in the store
- alcoholic drinks
- bulk foods
- foods sold at farmers markets and craft shows, when sold by the person who made them
- individual portions of food or condiments not for re-sale, such as ketchup packets and coffee creamers

Ingredient list

The ingredient list on food packages tells you what's in the food.

- Ingredients are listed by weight from most to least.
- The first few ingredients are those in the highest amounts.
- All added sugars are grouped together in brackets, after the word *Sugars*.



Example: Breakfast cereal

Ingredients: Whole grain oats, Whole grain wheat flour, Bran, Sugars (brown sugar, corn maltodextrin, barley malt extract), Salt, Sodium bicarbonate, Caramel colour blend, BHT (preservative).

In this ingredient list, whole grain oats, whole grain wheat flour, and bran are listed as the first 3 ingredients. This means that the cereal has more of these ingredients than the rest of the ingredients listed.

Nutrition Facts table

The Nutrition Facts table on the food label gives you information on serving size, calories, and at least 12 different nutrients. Use the Nutrition Facts table to compare similar foods.

Check Serving Size

The serving size is listed at the top of the Nutrition Facts table. All the information in the table is based on this amount of food. If you eat more or less than the listed serving size, you will be getting more or less of the nutrient amounts listed.

For example, if the serving size of a cereal is $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 mL/45 g) and you ate $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups (350 mL/90 g), you would get double of all the nutrients listed on the label.

Example: Breakfast cereal

Read Nutrition Facts

Compare similar foods.

Choose foods with:

Little or no trans fat per serving

2 g fibre or more per serving

Less than 15% DV of sodium and/or sugar

Nutrition Facts

Per 1 cup (30 g)

	% Daily Value*
Calories 180	
Fat 2 g	3 %
Saturated 0.4 g	2 %
+ Trans 0 g	
Carbohydrate 35 g	
Fibre 4 g	15 %
Sugars 7 g	7 %
Protein 5 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 120 mg	5 %
Potassium 450 mg	10 %
Calcium 30 mg	2 %
Iron 8 mg	45 %

*5% or less is **a little**, 15% or more is **a lot**

* 5% ou moins c'est peu, 15% ou plus c'est beaucoup

Check % Daily Value (DV)

A 5% or less DV means it has a little, a 15% or more DV means it has a lot.

When comparing products, you can use % DV to choose products that are higher in nutrients you may want more of:

- fibre
- vitamins
- minerals

Making healthier choices

Whole grains



Whole grains provide fibre, and many nutrients that work together to promote good health.

Look for **whole** or **whole grain** in front of the grain (for example: whole grain barley or whole rye).

Some whole grains don't need the words **whole** or **whole grain** in front of the name, as they're used only as whole grains (for example: oats, oatmeal, bulgur, and millet).

Salt (sodium)



Sodium is found in salt. Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed food containing salt or sodium. To reduce your intake:

- Choose fewer processed and packaged foods.
- Look for unsalted, low salt, and no-added salt foods.
- Read ingredient lists on packages. Limit foods with salt, sodium, or soda as one of the first 3 ingredients.
- Compare brands. Choose foods with **15% or less** DV for sodium.

Fats



Fats found in food can be unsaturated, saturated, or trans fats.

- Choose unsaturated fats. In the ingredient list look for: canola oil, olive oil, peanut oil, sunflower oil, soft non-hydrogenated margarine, or nuts and seeds.
- Limit saturated fat such as lard, butter, or coconut oil.
- Avoid trans fats. Products that may have trans fat include shortening, hard margarine, and partially hydrogenated oils.

Sugars

Sugars are found **naturally** in fruit, milk, and some vegetables. It can also be **added** to foods such as baked goods, candy, and soft drinks.

Look at both the ingredient list and the Nutrition Facts table to help you choose foods with less added sugar.

Ingredient list: Read the ingredient list to know if a food has added sugar.

Nutrition Facts table: On the Nutrition Facts table the *Sugars* includes **both** natural and added sugar. Compare brands and choose foods with a lower % DV for sugar.

Limit foods with 15% or more DV for sugar.

What is a nutrient content claim?

This is a statement on a package about a nutrient like fat, salt, or fibre. Always check the Nutrition Facts table when there is a claim on a package. For example something that is “low in saturated fat”, does not mean it is low in total fat.

Free, No, Zero, Without: The amount of the nutrient in the food is so small that it is not counted. Some examples include calorie-free, sugar-free, fat-free, or sodium-free.

Low, Little, Few: Product has a very small amount of the nutrient. Examples include low calorie, low saturated fat, low cholesterol, low sodium/salt, and low protein.

Reduced, Less, Lower, Fewer, Light: Product has at least 25% less of the nutrient compared to a similar product. May be used for products that are reduced in calories, fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium/salt, or sugar.

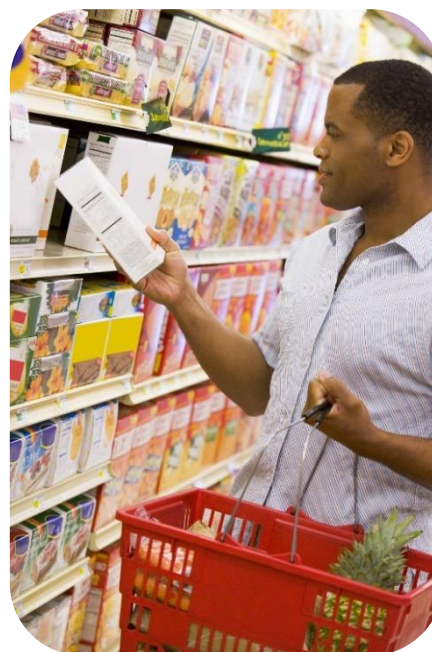
Lightly: Product has at least 50% less of the added nutrient compared to a similar product. May be used for products that are reduced in sodium/salt.

No added, Without added: Product has none of the added nutrients such as fat, sugar, and sodium/salt.

More, Higher, Higher in: Product has 25% more of the nutrient (may be used for products with more calories, fibre, and protein) compared to a similar product.

Source: Product has a large amount of the nutrient. For example a food with fibre could have one of the claims below:

Fibre claims	Amount of fibre per serving
Very high source	6 grams or more
High source	4 grams or more
Source	2 grams or more



For more information

Visit [HealthyEatingStartsHere.ca](https://www.healthyeatingstartsHere.ca) and search *Label Reading*.

To learn more about reading food labels go to [Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca) and search *understanding food labels*.