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Tools to Help You Build a Healthier Life!

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How to Read a Food Label

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Click on any underlined link within the food label to get a description of that section.

Macaroni & Cheese	
Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size <u>1 cup (228g)</u>	
Serving Per Container <u>2</u>	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories <u>250</u>	Calories from Fat <u>110</u>
% Daily Value *	
Total Fat <u>12g</u>	18%
Saturated Fat <u>3g</u>	15%
Cholesterol <u>30g</u>	10%
Sodium <u>470mg</u>	20%
Total Carbohydrate <u>31g</u>	10%
Dietary Fiber <u>0g</u>	0%
Sugars <u>5g</u>	
Protein <u>5g</u>	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%

Iron		4%	
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	55g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium		2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

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Serving size

It is important to pay attention to the serving size, including how many servings there are in the food package. Compare the serving size to how much you actually eat.

The size of the serving on the food package impacts all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. One serving of macaroni and cheese equals one cup. If you ate the whole package, you would eat two cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient amounts.

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Calories and calories from fat

Calories are a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. The label also tells you how many of the calories in one serving come from fat. In this example, there are 250 calories in a serving of macaroni and cheese. How many calories from fat are there in ONE serving? Answer: 110 calories, which means almost half come from fat. What if you ate the whole package content? Then, you would consume two servings, or 500 calories, and 220 of those would come from fat.

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% Daily Value

The % Daily Values (%DVs) are based on the Daily Value recommendations for key nutrients for a 2,000 calorie daily diet. You may not know exactly how many calories you consume in a day, but you can still use the %DV to help you figure out if a serving of food is high or low in a certain nutrient. This will help you know if the nutrients you get in a serving of food make up a lot or a little of that nutrient for your total daily diet. (By diet, we mean all the different foods you eat in a day.) Generally, anything lower than 5 percent isn't much and anything higher than 20 percent is a lot of that nutrient. Remember, if you double your serving, you also double the percent here.

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Limit these nutrients: Fat, cholesterol, and sodium

It is important to limit these nutrients. Eating too much fat, saturated fat, [trans fat](#), cholesterol, or sodium may raise your risk for certain diseases, like heart disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. Health experts recommend that you keep your intake of saturated fat, *trans* fat and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet.

- Foods that are high in saturated fat include cheese, whole milk, butter, regular ice cream, and some meats. If your foods are cooked in lard, palm oil, or coconut oil, they will also have saturated fat. Saturated fats tend to raise the level of cholesterol in your blood, which can put you at risk for heart disease.
- Unsaturated fats do not raise blood cholesterol. Foods with unsaturated fats include olives, avocados, fatty fishes like salmon, and most nuts. Olive, canola, sunflower, soy, corn, and peanut oils are high in unsaturated fats. Even though unsaturated fats don't raise blood cholesterol, all types of fat are high in calories and should be eaten in limited amounts.
- Trans fats are in foods that have "partially hydrogenated" vegetable oils that are found in some margarines, shortening, crackers, candies, baked goods, cookies, snack foods, fried foods, salad dressings, and other processed foods.

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Get enough of these nutrients: Vitamins, minerals and fiber

It is important to get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in your diet. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help lower the risk of some diseases and other health problems. For example, getting enough calcium may lower the risk of osteoporosis, a disease that causes brittle bones as one gets older. Eating a diet high in dietary fiber helps with healthy bowel function. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that have dietary fiber, especially soluble fiber, and are low in saturated fat and cholesterol may lower your risk of heart disease.

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Nutrients Without a %DV: Trans Fats, Protein, and Sugars

Trans fat, Sugars and, Protein do not list a %DV (Daily Value) on the Nutrition Facts label. Why?

Trans Fat: Experts say there is not enough information known to say how much trans fat you can have each day. Research studies link trans fat and saturated fat with raising blood LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels, both of which raise your risk of coronary heart disease. Keep your intake of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet.

Protein: Proteins play an important role in your growth and the repair of your body tissues. A %DV needs to be listed if a claim is made for protein, such as "high in protein." Otherwise, unless the food is meant for use by those under 4 years old, no %DV is needed. Protein intake is not thought of as a problem for those over 4 years of age.

Sugars: There are no recommendations for the total amount of sugar you should eat in one day. The sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts label include natural sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as those added to a food or drink. If you are worried about getting too much sugar, make sure that added sugars are not listed as one of the first few ingredients. Other names for added sugars include: corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, dextrose, sucrose, honey, and maple syrup.

To limit nutrients that have no %DV, like trans fats and sugars, compare the labels of similar products and choose the foods with the lowest amount.

Footnote

This part tells you the amount you should get of each nutrient if you take in 2,000 or 2,500 calories in one day. This part of the label does not change from food to food because it shows the recommended dietary advice for all Americans. Also, this information is just a general idea and individual needs vary.

Examples of Daily Values Based on a 2,000 Calorie Diet

Nutrient	Goal	Daily Value
Total Fat	Aim for less than	65g
Sat Fat	Aim for less than	20g
Cholesterol	Aim for less than	300mg
Sodium	Aim for less than	2400mg
Total Carbohydrate	Aim for at least	300g
Dietary Fiber	Aim for at least	25g

Content last updated September 10, 2008

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