

# How to Read Nutrition Facts Labels

## Overview

Nutrition Facts labels can be difficult to read and confusing for all ages. Many times, reading a nutrition label can create more questions than answers. Which nutrients are good for me? Should I pay attention to the number of grams or the % daily value? What are all of these ingredients? If adults struggle to understand nutrition labels, there's a good chance kids do too. It is important, however, for kids to understand what is in their food to start making healthy choices on their own. You can start by simplifying the information on nutrition labels to teach children to identify key nutrients that are common in healthy foods.



## Take Action

Nutrition Facts labels have a lot of information on them and can be overwhelming. Make it simple by focusing on:

- Serving size: How many servings are in the container? How does this compare to how much you're eating?
- Total calories
- Choosing foods that have *smaller* percentage Daily Value for saturated fat, added sugars and sodium
- Choosing foods that have *higher* percentage Daily Value for vitamins, minerals and fiber

## At home:

Get your kids comfortable with reading the label. Practice on the cereal box at home and on products at the grocery store, for example. Ask questions like “How many calories are in a serving?” “Does this food have fiber in it?” to familiarize them with the label and nutrition lingo.

## At school:

- Teach kids how to read Nutrition Facts labels as part of health education, or a science, math or literacy lesson.
- Incorporate practical skills into the lesson by practicing how to decipher real Nutrition Facts labels and how to choose the healthier option by reading the label.
- Extend it to home—Nutrition Facts labels are all around us! Teach parents how to read labels so kids and their families can make healthy decisions together.

## Tips



Pay attention to the serving size. Many times, the size of one serving is much less than we actually eat. Depending on how much you eat, you may have to double or triple the numbers on the label!



Check out the vitamins and minerals content. A food is considered a “good source” of that vitamin or mineral if it has 10% or more of it.



In general, the shorter the ingredient list, the better. The first ingredient on the list has the largest amount. Pay attention to the kind of ingredients, too. Try to eat natural-sounding ingredients



Recruit a registered dietitian to teach a lesson on how to read the label.

as opposed to chemical ones that are a hundred letters long.



Have a parent volunteer collect and cut out food labels for a classroom project or lesson.

## Resources

[How to Understand the Nutrition Facts Label \(Food and Drug Administration\)](#)

[Learn about the Nutrition Facts Label \(Food and Drug Administration\)](#)

[Read the Label Youth Outreach Campaign \(Food and Drug Administration\)](#)

[Understanding Health Claims on Nutrition Facts Labels \(American Heart Association\)](#)

[Nutrition Detectives \(Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center\)](#)

[What Laws Regulate Food and Nutrition Labels?](#)

### **Nutrition Education**

Nutrition education is especially important for kids, as they establish food patterns that carry into adulthood. Teaching students about MyPlate and the benefits of each food group can help promote healthy eating from a young age.

### **Offer Healthy Snacks**

In addition to nourishing bodies, snacks provide an opportunity to practice healthy eating habits.

### **Nutrition Education & Activities for Staff**

Providing nutrition education for staff is key to a successful school wellness program.

### **Healthy Cooking Club**

Cooking with kids is a great way to educate them about good nutrition, what's in season, planning and preparing meals, and reading food labels.