HEALTH COACH INSTITUTE
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How-to Read Food Labels & Nutrition Facts

A little practice and a systematic approach to reading food labels goes a long way! The best place to start learning how to read food labels is to **read the ingredients list.** This gives you a clear thumbs-up or thumbs-down to the packaged food you are considering eating or buying based on the criteria you are about to learn.

What to look for when reading the ingredients list:

- Read the ingredients in the order in which they are written.

Why is this important? Ingredients are listed in order of their quantity. This means that if sugar is the first ingredient listed, then the product is mostly sugar and similarly, if corn syrup is listed third, then the product contains a lot of it! If there are twenty or more ingredients—most of which are chemical names that sound like gibberish—put the product back on the shelf and walk away. It's best to go for products with minimal ingredients like 3 to 5 max that contain food ingredients that you can identify as food.

- Watch out for food "product" ingredients and misnomers.

This is the opposite of looking out for food ingredients that you can identify as food. This means being on the lookout for potentially harmful ingredients that are added to a product such as preservatives, additives, and a host of other toxic chemicals to extend shelf-life, alter color, and enhance flavor.

You have to be super attentive to misnomers too because oftentimes harmful ingredients are disguised with scientific sounding names to trick consumers such as hydrogenated vegetable oil, which is a fancy word for trans fats. It's especially important to look out for ingredients that you know you don't tolerate well, if that is the case, such as casein, gluten, soy, and corn.

- Learn about and understand complicated chemical names and acronyms.

The reason why this is so important is that these automatically mean that the product contains a host of preservatives, artificial flavors, colors, and sweeteners. Examples of preservatives to limit or avoid include BHT (preservative used to stabilize fats and preserve flavor, color, smell), BHA (preservative that prevents fats in the product going rancid), TBHQ (a toxic preservative used to extend shelf-life and prevent rancidity).

Color dyes, for example, are easy to spot as they are numbered as such: Blue #1 Brilliant Blue, Blue #2 Indigo Carmine, Citrus Red #2, Green #3 Fast Green, Red #40 Allura Red, Red #3 Erythrosine, Yellow #5 Tartrazine, Yellow #6 Sunset Yellow etc. If a "food" product comes in a color that you can't identify in nature, then assume that it is chemically altered. Be especially cautious of cereals and candy marketed to children.

The most popular artificial sweeteners used in "food" products that are notorious for causing a host of health issues are: Acesulfame-K, Aspartame, Equal®, NutraSweet®, saccharin, Sweet'n Low®, Sucralose, Splenda® and Sorbitol. Also, beware of foods labeled non-fat, low-fat and fat-free since they generally contain substitute chemicals including artificial sweeteners such as these listed.

- Focus on the serving size listed on the label.

The serving size is often there to make the rest of the Nutrition Facts Box appear reasonable to the consumer. For example, a person may eat a "normal" serving of three cookies at a time, which would result in 270 calories and 39 grams of carbohydrates. So, companies instead list the serving size on the cookie box as one, which only contains 90 calories and tricks the consumer into thinking they'll be consuming less calories, which is only the case if they eat one cookie instead of three.

- Think broader than the % Daily Value listed.

Companies are required to list the % Daily Value on their "food" product labels but remember that the best nutrition doesn't come in a packaged box. So, don't rely on labels for your nutritional intake. Instead, focus on getting the large majority of your macronutrients and micronutrients from whole food grown in Mother Nature's earth and if you must purchase packaged food, read the labels and get educated. It's your best way to ensure your optimal health.

Health Claims and Their Definitions—At a Glance

High	20% or more of the Daily Value
Good	10-19% of the Daily Value
Light	at least 1/3 fewer calories or 50% less fat
Less or fewer	25% less of a nutrient or of calories
Calorie-free	less than 5 calories
Low-calorie	40 calories or less
Sugar-free	less than 0.5 grams of sugar
Reduced sugar	at least 25% less sugar
Low-fat	3 grams or less of fat
Sodium-free or salt-free	less than 5 mg of sodium
Low-sodium	140mg of sodium or less
Good source of fiber	2.5-4.9 grams of fiber
Zero trans fat	less than 0.5 grams per serving

A Primer on "Eco-Labels"

Labels also try to tell us where and how our food was grown, raised or caught. Labels try to tell us what our food ate and what environmental impacts its raising or harvesting had. Companies WANT you to think their food is healthy, so here's how to tell the difference between which labels matter for your health and which don't. Labels can be easily differentiated by certified and non-certified. Choose certified labels as often as possible.

CERTIFIED LABELS

Grass-fed—Implies that the animals spend their lives on pasture eating what nature intended; they are not treated with hormones or antibiotics and are not fed unnatural grain.

Organic—In order or animal meat and dairy to be labeled "organic", the animal must never have been given antibiotics, hormones or GMO grasses.

GMO-Free/Non-GMO/Non-GMO Project Certified—Produced without the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Naturally Grown—Reserved for food produced on small farms that abide by the USDA Certified Organic methods of growing and selling locally.

NON-CERTIFIED LABELS

No Hormones Administered/No Hormones/Hormone-Free—The USDA prohibits the use of hormones in the raising of hogs or poultry in the United States. Beef may have this label.

Free-Range or Free-Roaming—Birds raised in this manner are able to go outdoors in order to engage in natural behaviors. However, birds only have to be allowed 5 minutes of open-air access a day in order to meet USDA requirements.

Pasture-Fed/Pasture-Raised—Indicates that animals were raised with humane treatment and have higher levels of micronutrients. For beef, labels must also read "organic" and "grass-fed" to make sure the animals were not fed GMO grains, grasses, corn or soy.

Natural—Supposed to not contain any artificial flavorings, color ingredients, chemical preservatives, or artificial or synthetic ingredients although this is sometimes a misnomer.

Minimally processed—A process that does not fundamentally alter the raw product.

Antibiotic-Free or Raised Without Antibiotics—Meat and poultry carrying these labels must not have had any antibiotics administered during the animal's lifetime.

Cage-Free—Implies that hens laying eggs are uncaged inside barns or warehouses. It does not mean the hens have access to the outdoors, but that they may be able to walk, nest or spread their wings.

Certified Humane Raised and Handled—Indicates that animals raised for dairy, lamb, poultry and beef products are treated in a humane manner and without the use of growth hormones or antibiotics.

Farmed Seafood or Fish Farming—Involves raising fish commercially in tanks or other enclosures and means that these fish are artificially raised and are not wild caught in their natural habitat.

Wild-Caught Seafood—Applies to seafood caught in their natural habitats by fisheries.

No Additives—Implies a product (or packaging) has not been enhanced with the addition of natural or artificial ingredients.