Are You Label Able?

There are many reasons people might look at food labels, but a lot of consumer would like to know how to better understand and use the information on the labels. Knowing how to read a food label can help you make quick, informed food choices that are part of a healthy diet.

The information at the top section of the Nutrition Facts label contains product-specific information such as serving size, calories per serving and nutrient information per serving. The bottom part of the label sometimes contains a footnote with Daily Values (DVs) for 2,000 and 2,500 calorie diets. This footnote is found only on larger packages and stays the same from product to product. It provides information on the recommended amounts for important nutrients including fats, sodium and fiber.

The first place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts label is the serving size and the number of servings in the package. The serving size may be listed in cups, pieces or another standard measure. The size of the serving on the food package influences the number of calories and all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. Notice that there may be more than one serving in a package.

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of a food. The calorie section of the label can help you manage your weight. The number of servings of the food you consume will determine the number of calories you actually eat. For example, if the food contains 250 calories per serving and you consume two servings, you have actually eaten 500 calories. The label will also show the number of calories that come from fat.

The nutrient section of the Nutrition Facts label shows some key nutrients that impact your health. The label shows two groups of nutrients: those we should limit and those we need to get enough of. The nutrients listed first on the label are the ones we typically eat enough or even too much of. These are the nutrients that we should limit in our diet and includes the total fat, cholesterol and sodium found in the product. Fat will be broken down into the types of fat in the food such as saturated fat, trans fat, polyunsaturated fat and monounsaturated fat. Health experts recommend that we keep our intake of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a healthy diet.

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Make meals and memories together. It’s a lesson they’ll use for life.
Any Days a Picnic Chicken Salad

**Ingredients:**
- 2 1/2 cups cooked, diced chicken breast
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons pickle relish
- 1/2 cup light mayonnaise

**Directions:**
1. Combine all ingredients.
2. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
3. Use within 1 to 2 days. Chicken salad does not freeze well.

Use to make chicken salad sandwiches, or make a pasta salad by mixing with 2 cups cooked pasta.

**Cost:**
- Per recipe—$4.56
- Per serving—$0.76

Source: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service

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**General Guide to Calories . . .**
*(based on a 2,000 calorie diet)*

- 40 calories per serving is low
- 100 calories per serving is moderate
- 400 calories or more per serving is high

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**Are You Label Able?**

Most Americans don’t get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron in their diets. These nutrients are identified on the Nutrition Facts label and should be considered nutrients that we need to get enough of. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and reduce the risk of some diseases. For example, getting enough calcium may reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

You can use the Nutrition Facts label to help you limit the nutrients you want to cut back and to increase the nutrients you need to consume in larger amounts. The % Daily Values (%DV) are based on the Daily Value recommendations for key nutrients based on a 2,000 calorie diet. The % DV helps you determine if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient. As a general rule, a %DV of 5% or less for a nutrient is low, while 20% DV or more is high. For nutrients that most of us need to eat more of, such as fiber, calcium or iron, your goal should be to eat foods that together give at least 100% of the Daily Value for that nutrient during a day’s time. For nutrients that we should eat less of, such as fat, cholesterol and sodium, the goal should be to eat no more than 100% a day.

The Nutrition Facts label is another tool to help you balance your diet. Use the label when you shop, as you plan your meals and as you cook each day. The label makes it easy to determine the amounts of nutrients you’re getting and to compare one product to another.

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**What’s the Purpose of Food Stamps?**

The Food Stamp Program isn’t about welfare. Its goal is helping people with limited incomes improve their nutrition for better health and disease prevention. The program is available to all eligible persons.

Food stamp coupons have been replaced by an electronic card that looks and works just like a typical debit or credit card used by any grocery shopper. No one but you and the grocery check-out clerk will know you are using Food Stamps. This program can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more contact 1-888-LAHELPU or visit www.dss.state.la.us.

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References: U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety & Applied Nutrition