



# Understanding the Nutrition Facts Label

**Elizabeth Kindamo**, Assistant Nutrition Educator and Program Coordinator

**Alison Berg**, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist

Circular 1323-04 published on May 7, 2025

Additional authors include Candace Tucker, MS, NDTR; and Hannah Wilson, PhD, RDN, LD.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the Nutrition Facts label on most packaged foods and beverages. This label is a tool that can help you make informed decisions and healthier food choices.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
2 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	<b>1 Cup (228g)</b>
<b>Amount Per Serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>250</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	<b>15%</b>
Saturated Fat 4g	<b>20%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	<b>10%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	<b>20%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	<b>11%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
Total Sugars 5g	
Includes 1g Added Sugars	<b>2%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 5g	<b>10%</b>
Vitamin D 1mcg	<b>4%</b>
Calcium 195mg	<b>15%</b>
Iron 0.72mg	<b>4%</b>
Potassium 0mg	<b>0%</b>
*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

Start Here **1**

Limit These Nutrients **2**

Get Enough of These Nutrients **3**

**4** See the footnote\*  
High = 20% or more  
Low = 5% or less

INGREDIENTS: ENRICHED MACARONI PRODUCT (WHEAT FLOUR, NIACIN, FERROUS SULFATE (IRON), THIAMINE MONONITRATE, [VITAMIN B1], RIBOFLAVIN [VITAMIN B2], FOLIC ACID), SUGAR, CHEESE SAUCE MIX (WHEY, MILKFAT, SALT, SODIUM TRIPOLYPHOSPHATE, CONTAINS LESS THAN 2% OF CITRIC ACID, LACTIC ACID, SODIUM PHOSPHATE, CALCIUM PHOSPHATE, YELLOW 5, ENZYMES, CHEESE CULTURE, VITAMIN D3).

Sample Nutrition Facts Label for Macaroni & Cheese.

## Reading the Label

### Step 1: Start at the Top

Start at the top of the label by checking the serving size. This is a reference amount, and all nutrition information will be referring to this serving size. If you eat more or less than the serving size, you will need to do a little bit of math to figure out what you ate or drank. For example, if you ate half of the listed serving size, you would be consuming half the calories, fat, and carbohydrates listed on the label.

## Step 2: Limit These Nutrients

Limit the nutrients listed immediately under the calories line—be aware of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugar (listed under carbohydrates) content. Most Americans consume more of these nutrients than they need.

## Step 3: Get Enough of These Nutrients

Get enough of the nutrients listed toward the bottom of the label. Vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium are all considered nutrients of concern. Most Americans do not consume enough of these nutrients.

## Step 4: Check the % Daily Value

Use the % Daily Value column to help you interpret whether a food is high or low in a particular nutrient. The daily value is the recommended amount of a nutrient to consume each day based upon a 2000-calorie reference diet. The % Daily Value listed is how much a single serving of the food contributes to the daily value for that nutrient. The daily value is a guideline to be used for reference. You may need more or less than the daily value. A general rule of thumb is that a serving of food providing 20% or more of the daily value is considered high in that nutrient, while a serving of food providing 5% or less of the daily value is considered low.

Ingredients in the food are listed below the Nutrition Facts label. Ingredients are listed by weight, with ingredients used in the greatest amount listed first.

## Label Lingo

The FDA regulates label claims that characterize the nutrient content of a food. These are known as nutrient content claims. Nutrient content claims may describe the amount of a nutrient in a food product or compare it to that of another food product.

**Free:** means the product contains no amount of, or only trivial amounts of, a nutrient. Examples include fat-free, calorie-free, and sodium-free.

**No Salt/Sugar Added:** means that no salt or sugar was added to the product during processing. *However, this does not always mean that the product is sodium- or sugar-free, since salt or sugar may have naturally been present in the food.*

**Low:** means that one serving of the product contains less than a specified amount of a particular nutrient. Some examples of the criteria for a food product to be considered **low** in a nutrient are:

Nutrient	Criteria (per serving)
Calories	40 calories or less
Total fat	3 g or less
Saturated fat	1 g or less
Cholesterol	20 mg or less
Sodium	140 mg or less

**Reduced:** means the product contains at least 25% less of a nutrient or calories compared to the original food product.

**Good Source:** means that the product contains 10%–19% of the daily value of a nutrient.

## Reference

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2013). *Guidance for industry: Food labeling guide*. <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-food-labeling-guide>