

Understanding Food Labels

Food labels are printed on every food we buy at the grocery store and they can be a great tool to assist in making healthy choices. However, to be able to use this tool, you have to know how to use it! KidSmart is here to help you locate the important things on a food label and help you understand what they mean.

Check the Calories!

Remember, this number is only the calories in 1 serving.

Saturated fat and trans fat are the bad fats!

Eating too much of these fats can lead to high cholesterol and blood pressure, among other things. Look for foods with ZERO grams of trans fats and limited saturated fat.

Fats, cholesterol, and sodium

should all be limited.

Pay attention to these numbers and aim for foods with low amounts of these nutrients!

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 3 oz (85g)	
Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 180	Calories from Fat 90
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 40g	20%
Trans Fat 0.5g	
Cholesterol 70mg	23%
Sodium 60mg	3%
Total Carbohydrate 0g	0%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 22g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 2%	Iron 15%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your caloric needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

Start

Pay attention to the serving size. If you are going to eat more than 1 serving, you have to multiply everything on the label by the number of servings you are eating. Also, how many servings are in a container? Many beverages and candy bars are more than 1 serving.

Look at the percentages.

A good rule of thumb to remember is that 5% or less is low and 20% or more is high. We want things like fat, cholesterol, and sodium to be low while its good to have other things, like fiber, vitamins, and minerals, be high.

Fiber is good for you!

It helps regulate the digestive tract and keeps you feeling fuller longer. This is a percentage you want to be high!

A good trick to remember with **sugar** is that 4 grams = 1 teaspoon. Do the math and imagine the teaspoons full of sugar! You want this number to be low.

Understanding Fats

Fat is essential to the structure of every cell in our body!

It is important to have some fat in our diet. But, we have to remember that there are healthy fats and unhealthy fats.

Remember, some fats are healthy fats!

These fats protect our organs, insulate our bodies and keep us warm, balance our hormones, keep our skin and arteries supple, and lubricate our joints. We should get our dietary fat from unsaturated fats—the healthy fat. Unsaturated fats come from vegetable sources and are found in oils like olive and sunflower and are also plentiful in fatty fish like tuna, salmon, and mackerel.

Trans Fats

are the other unhealthy fats! Most trans fats are man-made and are created to make food last longer. Trans fats are found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, cookies, pastries, and fried foods.

Trans fats, saturated fats, and cholesterol all raise the bad type of cholesterol in our bodies which increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. The good news is, these are all listed on the labels of the food we eat. Read the labels and watch out for these!

Unhealthy Fats

Saturated fats and trans fats are the unhealthy fats. Our bodies do not need them to stay healthy. In fact, a diet high in these 'unhealthy fats' can put us at risk for heart disease.

Saturated fats come from animal sources and are found in meat, eggs, and dairy products. Saturated fats are difficult to digest and are full of cholesterol.