General Information

Read any good labels lately? Unlike good novels, not many people read food or nutrition labels for fun even though you can get a lot of useful information from them. The goal of food labeling is to provide consumers with information that is factual and relevant. Food labels tell you what nutrients are in the products so you can make healthy food choices – especially if you are following a low-fat, low-sodium, or diabetic diet. Label information helps you avoid eating too much of the ingredients you're supposed to limit. If you have food allergies, reading food labels and knowing what is in a food can be a matter of life and death. Labels provide safe handling and storage instructions and also allow consumers to compare products.

Label Panels

A food package usually has at least two distinct areas: the principal display panel (PDP) and the information panel (IP). The PDP is the part of the label consumers see first when selecting a food product. In most cases, the PDP is the front of the package and is where information such as the name of the product and the net quantity of contents is located. The IP is usually to the immediate right of the PDP and is mainly reserved for nutritional information, the ingredient list and the name and address of the manufacturer/distributor. All required information must be legible and in English.

Responsible Firm

There must be a firm identified on the label as a responsible party. The firm's name, city, state and zip code must be declared.

Net Quantity

Every packaged food must declare its count, net weight (drained weight if appropriate) or volume. The net quantity refers only to the quantity of food in a package or container. It includes the weight of any liquid in which the food may be packed, if the liquid is usually eaten. It does not include the weight of the container or wrappers. This information must be stated in both English (inch-pound) units and metric units.

Ingredients

All packaged foods composed of two or more ingredients are required to include an ingredient list. Looking over the list of ingredients will help you identify whether there are ingredients that you may want to avoid for health or other reasons. The ingredient declaration must be legible and correctly listed in descending order of predominance by weight. Ingredients must be listed by their common names.

Product Dates

Product dating is optional for most foods. However, foods such as dairy products and shucked shellfish are required to have an expiration date that indicates the date before which the product should be eaten. Manufacturers utilize various dates and codes on labels to inform retailers and consumers when the product was made or how long the products should be offered for sale.

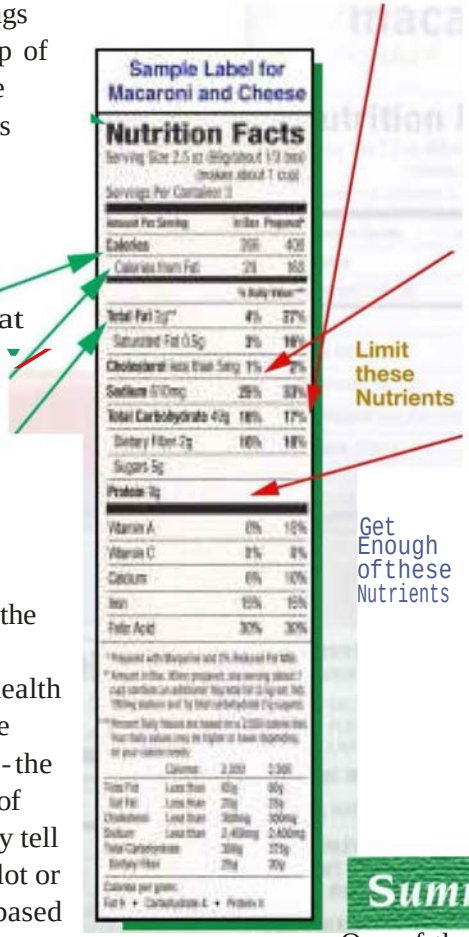
Improve Food Selection

Read nutrition labels often. Begin at home by examining one or two of your favorite foods for the calorie and fat content or for the sodium or protein content. Then, go to the store and look at the same information on similar products. You may be surprised to learn that there are differences depending on the product. Sample another version of the product you are comparing that contains fewer calories, less fat, less sodium or higher protein. You may find you like the new version just as well – which allows you to save on fat, calories, and sodium by switching. Continue experimenting, sometimes you will find an acceptable alternative and sometimes you won't, but it will be fun trying.

Nutrition Facts

The serving size and number of servings per container are listed first in the top of the Nutrition Facts box. Knowing the label information. The Nutrition Facts components:

- Total Calories - per serving.
- Total Calories from fat per serving.
- Total Fat–It is recommended that people get no more than 30% of calories from fat daily.



- Nutrients (listed below the calorie listing) are very important to the health of today's consumers. Proper nutrients in our foods may improve health or prevent diseases. The nutrients are listed in Percent Daily Values (%DV) - the total of which is located to the right of the nutrient. Percent DVs can quickly tell us whether a serving of food gives a lot or a little of the nutrients needed daily based on a person who consumes 2,000 calories a day. As a general rule of thumb, 5% or less is considered low and 20% or more is considered high for all nutrients. If a food has a high % DV for a nutrient, limit and balance it with foods that are lower in that nutrient. The food consumption total for the whole day, and not the percentage in one food or meal, is the most important.

drate is often used by diabetics to monitor the amount of carbohydrate in a food that will contribute to their blood glucose (sugar) carbohydrate food plan.

- Cholesterol, Sodium, and Sugar may be of concern to certain individuals with particular medical conditions.
- Protein - Protein is important throughout life. Everyone needs protein to maintain healthy tissues and keep the body running smoothly. Because some protein sources are better than others, looking at the number of protein grams listed will help you make important dietary decisions.

Summary

One of the important winning strategies for healthier lives is balanced daily eating habits. Proper diet, along with daily exercise, will improve your health. Reading food labels helps you control your family's nutritional needs. Remember, always consult your physician regarding diet and health issues.

FDA – www.fda.gov
USDA – www.usda.gov
CDC – www.cdc.gov
FDACS – www.fdacs.gov

Food Labels for Better Health

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Division of Food Safety