



What's on a Label?

Session Overview

In this session, participants will learn how to read food labels and use this information to select healthier foods. An educator will provide an overview of the information and nutrient listings found on food labels. Class participants will practice label reading by looking at food packages. The group will discuss what information is most useful to them and how they will use label reading to make healthier food choices.

Target Audience: English and Spanish speaking adults

Group Size: 5-30 participants

Time Needed: 30 – 45 minutes

Behavioral Objectives:

After the session participants will be able to:

1. Name three items listed on the Nutrition Facts label.
2. State at least 2 reasons it is important to read the food label when shopping for food.
3. Use the food label to choose a cereal that is high in fiber and a snack food low in sodium.

Key Message:

Individuals can use the food label to make healthier food choices and to compare the nutritional content of similar foods.

Materials Needed for Session:

- Primary handouts: USDA Team Nutrition *Read It Before You Eat It* mini poster; USDA 10 Tips 3 tip sheets: *Salt & Sodium*, *Make Half Your Grains Whole*, *Cut Back on Your Kid's Sweet Treats*; sample cereal label
- Sample nutrition labels including cereal boxes, bread packages, dairy product labels, snack food packages, ramen noodle package, canned food, 100% juice and fruit-flavored drink nutrition labels, etc.
- Cereal, bowls, measuring cups, teaspoon
- Optional: USDA Team Nutrition *Read It Before You Eat It* poster; *NEOP Flavors of My Kitchen* cookbook

Outline of 45-minute session: (30-minute session in italics)

- Welcome and introduction to “What’s on a Label?” (3 min) (2 min)
- Activity 1: Serving Size and Servings per Container (5 min) (4 min)
- Activity 2: Nutrition Numbers (14 min) (10 min)
- Activity 3: Ingredient List & Front of Package Information (5 min) (3 min)
- Activity 4: Practice Reading Food Labels (10 min) (7 min)
- Activity 5: Using the Food Label to Find Healthier Foods (3 min) (2 min)
- Conclusion and Evaluation (5 min) (3 min)

Welcome to “What’s on a Label?” (3 min)

1. Welcome and introduce the class topic (*If teaching this class as a series, review the past class and home activities.*)
2. Review the class objectives and the key message. Ask the following questions:
 - How many of you read food labels when you shop for food?
 - Who can tell me what is on a food label? *Calories, fat, fiber, etc.*
 - Why is it important to read food labels? *Make healthy food choices, compare similar foods, find out what is in different foods, etc.*

Today we will start a two-part class to help you make healthier food and beverage choices. In part one, we will discuss how to read food labels and in part two, we will discuss beverages. (*Distribute the handouts.*)

Activity 1: Serving Size and Servings Per Container (5 min)

We will start at the top of the Nutrition Facts label and then go through each section. Who can tell me the first thing listed on a food label? Look in the **orange** section of the **Read It poster** and **handout**. Serving size and number of servings per container are listed first.

- What is the serving size for this food? *1 cup*
- How many servings are in the package? *2*

This information is on all Nutrition Facts labels. Let’s take a closer look at serving size.

Activity: I need one volunteer.

- Please pour the amount of cereal you would normally eat into this bowl.
- Read the serving size listed on the cereal box and pour that amount into this bowl.
- Compare the amount of cereal you typically eat to the serving size listed on the label.
- Estimate the number of calories in the amount of cereal you poured to the calories in one serving.

Activity 2: Nutrition Numbers (14 min)

Now we will review calories, nutrients and other sections of the Nutrition Facts label.

1. **Calories:** Look below the orange section at the **white** section.

The calories and nutrient content listed on the label is for one serving. If you eat two servings, you need to double the calories and nutrient values listed.

- If you eat 1 serving of this food (1 cup), how many calories have you eaten? *250*
- If you eat the whole package (2 cups), how many calories have you eaten? *500*

Sometimes we may eat a whole package of food not knowing how many servings it contains. Many packages contain more than one serving. So, next time think twice before you eat the whole package.

2. **Nutrients:** Now we will look at the blue and purple sections of the Nutrition Facts label. How do we know if a food is high or low in the nutrients listed? Look at the % Daily Value. 5% or less is low and 20% or more is high.

- a. **Nutrients to GET LESS of:** We want to get less of the items listed in the **blue** section. The percentage to the right of these nutrients should be 5% or less. This means the food is low in those nutrients. If you see 20% or more, the food is high in those nutrients.

- i. **Fat & Cholesterol:**

- What nutrients do you see listed? *Total fat, saturated fat, trans fat & cholesterol*

- Do you see any nutrients with 5% or less? *No*
- Do you see any nutrients with 20% or more? *Total fat is close; it has 18%. This means this food provides you with 18% of the total fat you need for the whole day.*
- Fat provides flavor to food, helps you feel full and helps absorb some vitamins. However, we only need a small amount.
- Limiting your intake of total fat (including saturated fat and trans fat) and cholesterol may reduce your risk for certain chronic diseases such as heart disease and some cancers.

ii. **Sodium:**

If you look just below the blue section you will see sodium in the **white** section. We also want to limit the amount of sodium we eat because sodium plays a role in high blood pressure. If you look you at the top of the ***Salt and Sodium*** handout you will see we should reduce our sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg* per day which is about 1 teaspoon (*show a teaspoon*).

- What percent do you see to the right of sodium? *20%*
- Is this high or low? *High - So we know this food is high in sodium.*
- How many milligrams of sodium does one serving of the food on the poster provide? *470 mg*
- How many milligrams of sodium do two servings of this food provide? *940 mg – almost half of the sodium we need for the whole day!*
- The ***Salt and Sodium*** handout provides tips to reduce our sodium intake. Can someone please read tips 2, 3, and 7?

****Note:*** *USDA Read It poster and handout are outdated (2,400 mg).*

iii. **Sugars:**

If you look just below fiber you will see sugars. This includes both natural and added sugars.

- Natural sugar is found in fruits, dairy and grains. Added sugar is found in foods like cookies cakes, ice cream, sweetened drinks and other foods.
- Added sugar is not separated from “natural” sugar on the Nutrition Facts label; it is listed in the ingredient list.
- Does this food have added sugar? We do not know because the ingredient list is not on this poster or handout. We would have to read the ingredient list to check if this food has added sugar.
- The ***Sweet Treats*** handout provides tips on how to limit added sugars. Can someone please read tips 1, 2 and 8?

b. **Nutrients to GET ENOUGH of:** We want to get enough of the items in the **purple** section. These are nutrients we need so we want the percent to be 20% or more.

- What nutrients do you see in the purple section? *Dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron*
- Do you see any nutrients with 20% or more? *Yes – calcium*

- Do you see any nutrients with 5% or less? *Yes – fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C and iron. So this food is a good source of calcium but not vitamin A & C, iron and fiber.*

Fiber: Let's take a closer look at fiber. Look at the top of the *Make Half Your Grains Whole* handout. This lists examples of whole grains.

- How many grams of fiber are in 1 serving? *0 g; 0%*
- Do you think this is a whole grain? *No, a whole grain would have fiber.*
- The handout provides tips to increase fiber. Can someone please read these tips 1, 10 and 8?

Activity: Now that you have looked at the Nutrition Facts label on the *Read It* poster, can you guess what food it is? Remember it is high in total fat and sodium but it is also high in calcium. *Macaroni and Cheese*

Activity 3: Ingredient List and Front of Package Information (5 min)

Now let's look at the front of the food package and the ingredient list.

1. **Front of package:** If you look at the front of a food package you may see different terms and claims. For example, if you look at the front of this cereal box (*use one from the kit*) you will see it claims to be "whole grain".
 - Do you think this cereal is a good source of whole grains? *Maybe; it may contain a little or a lot but we need to look at the fiber percent and ingredient list to make sure.*
 - What are some other terms and claims you may have seen on food packages?
 - Nutrient content claims: *"low sodium", "low fat", "100% juice", "gluten-free"*
 - Health claims: *"Heart healthy", "Helps lower cholesterol", "Boosts immunity"*
 - Fat-free or low-fat does not mean calorie-free. Lower fat items may have as many calories as the full-fat versions. Read the label.
2. **Ingredient list:** The ingredient list may be harder to find. It is usually on the side or back of a food package and is usually in small print.
 - a. Ingredients are listed in order from most to least. When an ingredient is close to the top of the list, the food is high in that ingredient.
 - b. You may have heard of some ingredients and there are some you may have never heard of and can't pronounce. Processed foods may have ingredients you have not heard of like preservatives, added colorings, added flavorings and more.
 - c. Let's look at the ingredient list of this sample cereal label. (*Distribute laminated cereal Nutrition Facts labels*)
 - Do you see any ingredients you have never heard of or can't pronounce? *Partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, whey, annatto extract, BHT*
 - Is this a whole grain? *Yes – the first ingredient is corn and the second ingredient is whole wheat.*
 - Does it have added sugar? *Yes – sugar, brown sugar, corn syrup, malted corn and barley syrup and honey are listed in the ingredient list.*

Activity 4: Practice Reading Food Labels (10 min)

Now we are going to practice reading food labels. Some of you brought food packages from home. I also have a box of food packages you can choose from. I want to make sure everyone has one or two food packages. Please stand up (or raise your hand) if the following describes your food:

- Serving Size = 1 cup
- Serving Size = less than 1 cup
- Servings Per Container = 2 or more
- Calories = 300 or less
- Total Fat = 5% or less
- Sodium = 20% or more
- Dietary Fiber = 20% or more
- Vitamin A = 5% or less
- Vitamin C = 20% or more
- Calcium = 20% or more
- Iron = 5% or less
- A whole grain
- Has added sugar
- Has an ingredient I can't pronounce
- Has 5 or less ingredients
- Has a health claim

As you can see, we have a wide variety of foods with different nutrients and different ingredients. We can use this information to compare foods or brands to make healthier food choices. For example, some snack foods, such as chips, have more fat but less sodium than other snack foods, such as pretzels and crackers. So, it is up to you if you want to choose the snack with less fat or the snack with less sodium.

Activity 5: Using the food label to find healthier foods (3 min)

In small groups or in pairs, discuss the following questions:

1. What items on the food label are most helpful to you?
2. What food label are you going to read before you buy the item next time?

Conclusion and Evaluation (5 min)

Don't be surprised if you hear about food labels in the news. The Nutrition Facts label may be updated in the near future and it is still important to read labels. Get the most nutrition for your calories. Compare the calories to the nutrients you would get. If you are getting a lot of calories, you should be getting a lot of nutrients.

Home Activities:

1. Read at least two cereal box labels and the label on two of your favorite snack foods during your next trip to the grocery store.
2. Go to the FDA website or search on the internet for "eat for a healthy heart FDA consumer update video" to get links for videos and handouts that have additional information about food labels.

Evaluation:

- Do you have any questions?
- Let's review. (*Distribute evaluation forms or conduct verbally.*)

What's on a Label?

After attending this class I feel confident that I can:

	Agree Very Much	Agree	I Am Not Sure	Disagree	Disagree Very Much
1. Name 3 items listed on the Nutrition Facts label.					
2. State at least 2 reasons it is important to read the food label when shopping for food.					
3. Use the food label to choose a cereal that is high in fiber and a snack food low in sodium.					

Closing:

Thanks for attending the class and I hope you are now able to use the information on a food label to make healthier choices.

If part of a series of classes:

Now we will take a closer look at some of your favorite beverages by reading the labels and comparing portion sizes.

For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. Funded by USDA SNAP-Ed, an equal opportunity provider and employer.
Visit www.CaChampionsForChange.net for healthy tips.



READ IT *before you EAT IT!*

How many servings are you eating?



Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving
Calories 250 Calories from Fat 110

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans fat 0g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%

Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 4%	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 20%	Iron 4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat 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

What food would have this Nutrition Facts label? Answer below.*

Get What You Need!



Get LESS
5% or less is low
20% or more is high



Get ENOUGH
5% or less is low
20% or more is high



What's the Best Choice for You?

Use the Nutrition Facts Label to Make Choices

Plain Muffin
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	4.5g	9%
Saturated Fat	1.5g	3%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	25g	8%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	10g	20%
Protein	2g	4%

Lowfat Doughnut
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	10g	20%
Saturated Fat	3g	6%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	30mg	6%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	25g	8%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	10g	20%
Protein	2g	4%

Lowfat Cushman Crackers
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	12g	24%
Saturated Fat	3g	6%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	25g	8%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	0g	0%
Protein	2g	4%

Vegetarian Chili
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	12g	24%
Saturated Fat	3g	6%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	25g	8%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	0g	0%
Protein	2g	4%

Vegetarian Pizza
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	12g	24%
Saturated Fat	3g	6%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	25g	8%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	0g	0%
Protein	2g	4%

Lowfat Cheddar Biscuits
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	12g	24%
Saturated Fat	3g	6%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	25g	8%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	0g	0%
Protein	2g	4%

Lowfat Milk, 1%
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	1.5g	3%
Saturated Fat	0.5g	1%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	5mg	1%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	12g	4%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	10g	20%
Protein	8g	16%

Storage Beans
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	1.5g	3%
Saturated Fat	0.5g	1%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	12g	4%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	0g	0%
Protein	8g	16%

Orange Beef, Pine Cakes
Nutrition Facts

Total Fat	1.5g	3%
Saturated Fat	0.5g	1%
Trans Fat	0g	0%
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	2%
Total Carbohydrate	12g	4%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%
Sugars	0g	0%
Protein	8g	16%

*Answers: Box of macaroni and cheese

How do your choices stack up? This combination of foods and amounts meets the MyPyramid food group recommendations for about 2,000 calories a day. The photos show approximate serving sizes from the five major food groups of the MyPyramid. This combination of food choices shows the servings from the Pyramid for an older child, or teen girl, for one day. Teen boys may need more servings of foods.

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10 tips

Nutrition
Education Series

salt and sodium

10 tips to help you cut back



It's clear that Americans have a taste for salt, but salt plays a role in high blood pressure. Everyone, including kids, should reduce their sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day (about 1 teaspoon of salt). Adults age 51 and older, African Americans of any age, and individuals with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should further reduce their sodium intake to 1,500 mg a day.

1 think fresh

Most of the sodium Americans eat is found in processed foods. Eat highly processed foods less often and in smaller portions—especially cheesy foods, such as pizza; cured meats, such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs, and deli/luncheon meats; and ready-to-eat foods, like canned chili, ravioli, and soups. Fresh foods are generally lower in sodium.

2 enjoy home-prepared foods

Cook more often at home—where you are in control of what's in your food. Preparing your own foods allows you to limit the amount of salt in them.

3 fill up on veggies and fruits—they are naturally low in sodium

Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits—fresh or frozen. Eat a vegetable or fruit at every meal.

4 choose dairy and protein foods that are lower in sodium

Choose more fat-free or low-fat milk and yogurt in place of cheese, which is higher in sodium. Choose fresh beef, pork, poultry, and seafood, rather than those with salt added. Deli or luncheon meats, sausages, and canned products like corned beef are higher in sodium. Choose unsalted nuts and seeds.

5 adjust your taste buds

Cut back on salt little by little—and pay attention to the natural tastes of various foods. Your taste for salt will lessen over time.



6 skip the salt

Skip adding salt when cooking. Keep salt off the kitchen counter *and* the dinner table. Use spices, herbs, garlic, vinegar, or lemon juice to season foods or use no-salt seasoning mixes. Try black or red pepper, basil, curry, ginger, or rosemary.

7 read the label

Read the Nutrition Facts label and the ingredients statement to find packaged and canned foods lower in sodium. Look for foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added.”

8 ask for low-sodium foods when you eat out

Restaurants may prepare lower sodium foods at your request and will serve sauces and salad dressings on the side so you can use less.

9 pay attention to condiments

Foods like soy sauce, ketchup, pickles, olives, salad dressings, and seasoning packets are high in sodium. Choose low-sodium soy sauce and ketchup. Have a carrot or celery stick instead of olives or pickles. Use only a sprinkling of flavoring packets instead of the entire packet.

10 boost your potassium intake

Choose foods with potassium, which may help to lower your blood pressure. Potassium is found in vegetables and fruits, such as potatoes, beet greens, tomato juice and sauce, sweet potatoes, beans (white, lima, kidney), and bananas. Other sources of potassium include yogurt, clams, halibut, orange juice, and milk.

10 tips

Nutrition
Education Series

make half your grains whole



10 tips to help you eat whole grains

Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley, or another cereal grain is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas, and grits are examples. Grains are divided into two subgroups, **whole grains** and **refined grains**. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel—the bran, germ, and endosperm. People who eat whole grains as part of a healthy diet have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases.

1 make simple switches

To make half your grains whole grains, substitute a whole-grain product for a refined-grain product. For example, eat 100% whole-wheat bread or bagels instead of white bread or bagels, or brown rice instead of white rice.



2 whole grains can be healthy snacks

Popcorn, a whole grain, can be a healthy snack. Make it with little or no added salt or butter. Also, try 100% whole-wheat or rye crackers.



3 save some time

Cook extra bulgur or barley when you have time. Freeze half to heat and serve later as a quick side dish.

4 mix it up with whole grains

Use whole grains in mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soups or stews and bulgur wheat in casseroles or stir-fries. Try a quinoa salad or pilaf.

5 try whole-wheat versions

For a change, try brown rice or whole-wheat pasta. Try brown rice stuffing in baked green peppers or tomatoes, and whole-wheat macaroni in macaroni and cheese.



6 bake up some whole-grain goodness

Experiment by substituting buckwheat, millet, or oat flour for up to half of the flour in pancake, waffle, muffin, or other flour-based recipes. They may need a bit more leavening in order to rise.

7 be a good role model for children

Set a good example for children by serving and eating whole grains every day with meals or as snacks.

8 check the label for fiber

Use the Nutrition Facts label to check the fiber content of whole-grain foods. Good sources of fiber contain 10% to 19% of the Daily Value; excellent sources contain 20% or more.



9 know what to look for on the ingredients list

Read the ingredients list and choose products that name a whole-grain ingredient **first** on the list. Look for "whole wheat," "brown rice," "bulgur," "buckwheat," "oatmeal," "whole-grain cornmeal," "whole oats," "whole rye," or "wild rice."

10 be a smart shopper

The color of a food is not an indication that it is a whole-grain food. Foods labeled as "multi-grain," "stone-ground," "100% wheat," "cracked wheat," "seven-grain," or "bran" are usually not 100% whole-grain products, and may not contain any whole grain.



cut back on your kid's sweet treats



10 tips to decrease added sugars

Limit the amount of foods and beverages with added sugars your kids eat and drink. If you don't buy them, your kids won't get them very often. Sweet treats and sugary drinks have a lot of calories but few nutrients. Most added sugars come from sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks, juice drinks, cakes, cookies, ice cream, candy, and other desserts.

1 serve small portions

It's not necessary to get rid of all sweets and desserts. Show kids that a small amount of treats can go a long way. Use smaller bowls and plates for these foods. Have them share a candy bar or split a large cupcake.

2 sip smarter

Soda and other sweet drinks contain a lot of sugar and are high in calories. Offer water, 100% juice, or fat-free milk when kids are thirsty.



3 use the check-out lane that does not display candy

Most grocery stores will have a candy-free check-out lane to help moms out. Waiting in a store line makes it easy for children to ask for the candy that is right in front of their faces to tempt them.

4 choose not to offer sweets as rewards

By offering food as a reward for good behavior, children learn to think that some foods are better than other foods. Reward your child with kind words and comforting hugs, or give them non-food items, like stickers, to make them feel special.

5 make fruit the everyday dessert

Serve baked apples, pears, or enjoy a fruit salad. Or, serve yummy frozen juice bars (100% juice) instead of high-calorie desserts.



6 make food fun

Sugary foods that are marketed to kids are advertised as "fun foods." Make nutritious foods fun by preparing them with your child's help and being creative together. Create a smiley face with sliced bananas and raisins. Cut fruit into fun and easy shapes with cookie cutters.

7 encourage kids to invent new snacks

Make your own snack mixes from dry whole-grain cereal, dried fruit, and unsalted nuts or seeds. Provide the ingredients and allow kids to choose what they want in their "new" snack.



8 play detective in the cereal aisle

Show kids how to find the amount of total sugars in various cereals. Challenge them to compare cereals they like and select the one with the lowest amount of sugar.

9 make treats "treats," not everyday foods

Treats are great once in a while. Just don't make treat foods an everyday thing. Limit sweet treats to special occasions.

10 if kids don't eat their meal, they don't need sweet "extras"

Keep in mind that candy or cookies should not replace foods that are not eaten at meal time.