

Reading Food Labels

getthehearthealthy.ca/reading-food-labels

In this section you will learn:

- Why it is important to read food labels
 - How to read food labels
 - Which nutrients impact heart health
- Food labels provide information on the nutrients and ingredients within packaged food products.
 - Understanding how to read food labels helps you make informed decisions about the foods you eat.

How to Read Food Labels

1

Serving Size

When comparing items, ensure you are comparing the same amount. The serving size is often listed as both a common measure (e.g., # of crackers) and a weight measure (e.g., grams). The serving size is not a regulated number; it is set by the company. For example, the serving size for one loaf of bread may be one slice, and for another, it may be two slices.

2

% Daily Value

% Daily Value (%DV) is a regulated number that is based on the recommended amounts of nutrients that the average person consumes daily. The %DV acts as a benchmark, helping you to determine if a food is high or low in certain nutrients. Five per cent or less is said to be “a little” and 15 per cent or more is said to be “a lot”.

3

Nutrients

Use the %DV to see if the serving size is high or low in certain nutrients. For heart health, choose products that have a %DV of 15 per cent or more for fibre, and a %DV of 5 per cent or less for saturated fat, sodium, and sugar.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 9 crackers (23 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 90	
Fat 4.5 g	7 %
Saturated 2.5 g + Trans 0 g	13 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 280 mg	12 %
Carbohydrate 12 g	
Fibre 1 g	4 %
Sugars 0 g	0 %
Protein 3 g	
Vitamin A 0 %	Vitamin C 0 %
Calcium 2 %	Iron 8 %



Ingredients in Disguise!

Ingredients are listed in order by weight, from highest to lowest. It is important to note that there are many alternative names for different types of fats, sugars, and salts. This means that these food ingredients might seem “hidden” on the ingredient list.

Nutrients That Impact Heart Health

Fat

- Saturated and trans fats increase LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels, which can lead to narrowing and hardening of the arteries.
- Examples of foods high in saturated and trans fats: full-fat dairy such as butter and cheese, red meat, fried foods, and shortening.
- Alternative names on ingredient list: beef fat, butter, shortening, palm oil, coconut, milk solids, ghee, hydrogenated oil.

Sodium

- Sodium (salt) has been linked to increased blood pressure, which contributes to cardiovascular disease. Most of the sodium in your diet comes from processed foods and restaurant or take-out meals.
- Alternative names on ingredient list: celery/garlic/onion salt, monosodium glutamate, brine, rock salt, sodium nitrate, baking soda.

Fibre

- Fibre can decrease LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels, maintain bowel regularity, and keep you full for longer. Fibre is only found in plants, so you will not find it on nutrition labels for animal products.
- Examples of foods high in fibre: fruits, vegetables, lentils, brown rice, and oats.

Sugar

- A high intake of added sugar is associated with cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, and liver disease.
- Sugar is naturally found in some foods such as milk, fruit, and yogurt, which have high nutritional value. Unfortunately, food labels do not distinguish between added and natural sugar. We must have the knowledge to be able to recognize the source.
- Examples of foods high in added sugar: baked goods, cereals, soft drinks, condiments.
- Sugar-based ingredients are grouped on the ingredient list after the title ‘sugars’

Test Your Knowledge

If you plan to eat 8 crackers, which product would you select?

Nutrition Facts			
Per 8 crackers (42 g)			
Amount	% Daily Value		
Calories 90			
Fat 4.5 g			7 %
Saturated 2.5 g			
+ Trans 0 g			13 %
Cholesterol 0 mg			
Sodium 280 mg			12 %
Carbohydrate 12 g			4 %
Fibre 1 g			4 %
Sugars 0 g			0 %
Protein 3 g			
Vitamin A 0 %	Vitamin C 0 %		
Calcium 2 %	Iron 8 %		

Saturated fat: _____
Trans fat: _____
Sodium: _____
Fibre: _____
Sugar: _____

Nutrition Facts			
Per 4 crackers (20 g)			
Amount	% Daily Value		
Calories 41			
Fat 2 g			3 %
Saturated 0.3 g			
+ Trans 0 g			2 %
Cholesterol 0 mg			
Sodium 90 mg			4 %
Carbohydrate 15 g			5 %
Fibre 1 g			4 %
Sugars 1 g			1 %
Protein 2 g			
Vitamin A 0 %	Vitamin C 0 %		
Calcium 2 %	Iron 8 %		

Saturated fat: _____
Trans fat: _____
Sodium: _____
Fibre: _____
Sugar: _____