

Reading a nutrition label

Easy · 10 min to read; 30 seconds per label after that · Free

Every number on the label is for one serving, so check servings per container first and multiply if you eat more. Then use % Daily Value: 5% or less is low, 20% or more is high. Aim for less than 100% a day of saturated fat (20 g), sodium (2,300 mg) and added sugars (50 g), and at least 28 g of fiber. Compare products only when serving sizes match, and remember "0 g" can mean up to half a gram per serving.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Any packaged food

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 Start with servings per container and serving size.** Every number on the label, including calories, is for one serving. Serving size reflects what people typically eat; it isn't a recommendation.
- 2 Multiply for what you'll actually eat.** In the FDA's example, a frozen lasagna has 4 servings of 280 calories, so the whole package is 1,120 calories. A cup of cooked spaghetti is one serving; two cups is two.
- 3 Check calories against your needs.** Labels use 2,000 calories a day as a general guide, but yours depend on your age, sex, height, weight and activity.
- 4 Use % Daily Value as a quick guide: 5% or less of a nutrient per serving is low, 20% or more is high.** You don't need to do math; the label does it.
- 5 Get less of saturated fat, sodium and added sugars, which Americans generally eat too much of.** Get more of fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium, which most don't get enough of.
- 6 Compare similar products side by side, making sure the serving sizes match. %DV also lets you compare "light," "low" and "reduced" claims without memorizing definitions.**

Watch out "0 g" isn't always zero. A food with less than 0.5 grams of saturated fat per serving can say it has none, so it adds up if you eat several servings. The same goes for trans fat.

DAD NOTE Read the serving size first. The rest of the label depends on it.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/body/eating-well-without-extremes/reading-a-nutrition-label/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: U.S. Food and Drug Administration; MedlinePlus (National Library of Medicine); American Heart Association.