Health Canada Santé Canada

Nutrition Labelling

Get the Facts!

Nutrition Labelling... Get the Facts! series provides background information and is designed to help communicate consistent and accurate messages to consumers.

Canada

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Nutrition Labelling... Get the Facts!

Inside

Preface

Canada has a new system for providing nutrition information on food labels. Most prepackaged foods will have ***Nutrition Facts.*** This is designed so that nutrition information will be easier to find and easier to read. Some products will also carry ***nutrition claims.*** Most nutrition claims highlight a specific nutrient in a food, such as fat or fibre. These types of nutrition claims are referred to specifically as nutrient content claims. Some nutrition claims reinforce the role of healthy eating as part of a lifestyle that can reduce the risk of developing a chronic disease, such as heart disease or cancer. These types of nutrition claims are referred to specifically as diet-related health claims.

With effective education, the widespread availability of nutrition information on food labels offers a significant opportunity to improve the nutritional health and well-being of Canadians. The new nutrition information on food labels provides an opportunity to take a fresh approach to healthy eating messages and nutrition programs.

Nutrition Labelling … Get the Facts! series is designed to help communicate consistent and accurate messages to consumers. Each background fact sheet in this series explores nutrition labelling concepts and features, and proposes strategies for maximizing learning opportunities and meeting educational challenges. Key messages, based on consumer research and consultation, are identified and will direct communication to areas where Canadians need more support to better use nutrition information on food labels.

Features of the Background Fact Sheets

These background fact sheets can be used individually or as a series. Each background fact sheet begins with an objective and, where appropriate, includes a key message for consumers, practical tips, hands-on activities that can be used "one-on-one" or with a group, and case studies–all intended to make it easier to communicate the basic principles.

The ideas and concepts in these Fact Sheets support the "Ready-to-go" presentation, which includes more activities, and is also a part of the Nutrition Labelling Toolkit for Educators.

For more complete information please consult the regulations on Health Canada's nutrition labelling Web site (see Web address below).

Key Messages

Nutrition Facts: easy to find, easy to read, and on more foods.

Use Nutrition Facts, the ingredient list and nutrition claims to make informed food choices.

Nutrition Facts are based on a specific amount of food – compare this to the amount you eat.

Use % Daily Value to see if a food has a lot or a little of a nutrient.

For More Information

Nutrition Labelling
Health Canada: **www.healthcanada.ca/nutritionlabelling**
Canadian Food Inspection Agency: **www.inspection.gc.ca**

Other sources of information
Health Canada's Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion: **www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/index_e.html**
Health Canada's Food Program: **www.hc-sc.gc.ca/food-aliment/**
Canadian Health Network: **www.canadian-health-network.ca/**

For additional information, contact your local or community health office or your provincial Department of Health.

Published by authority of the Minister of Health.
This publication is also available on the Health Canada Web site: **www.healthcanada.ca/nutritionlabelling**

Également disponible en français sous le titre *Le point sur l'étiquetage nutritionnel… Fiches explicatives.*

January 2003

Nutrition Labelling: A Description

Objective: To build awareness and understanding of the key concepts and features of nutrition information on food labels.

Nutrition Facts: easy to find, easy to read, and on more foods.

What Is the Nutrition Information on Food Labels?

Nutrition information on food labels can support consumers in making informed food choices. It can be found in nutrition labelling (to be provided on labels of prepackaged foods, under the title "Nutrition Facts"); nutrition claims, which include both nutrient content claims and health claims; and the ingredient list. It does *not* refer to all information on the label, such as labelling related to allergens, food biotechnology (genetically modified organisms–GMOs), organic certification, irradiation processes or the "best before" date.

A New Nutrition Labelling Policy

Nutrition labelling is the standardized presentation of the nutrient content of a food, based on a specific amount of food. It will appear on most prepackaged foods in a table format with the title "Nutrition Facts."

This new Nutrition Facts will be the most obvious change for consumers. It includes more complete nutrient information that is easier to find and read. The changes are the result of contributions from many sources–an external advisory committee, consumer research, consultation and correspondence, expert input, and insights from the US model–ensuring that it is based on sound science and reflects consumers' best interests.

Nutrition Facts

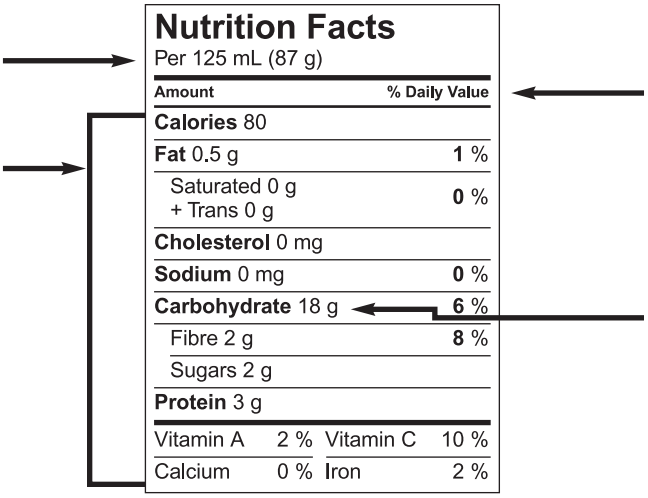
- Consistent look and content: The Nutrition Facts table is designed so that it is easy to read and looks the same on most products. The same core nutrients are always listed in the same order. A predictable look makes it easy to find and use.
- On more foods: Almost all prepackaged food products must display the Nutrition Facts.
- More complete than ever: The Nutrition Facts table has information on Calories and an expanded list of nutrients that consumers and health professionals consider important to health–the core nutrient list.

Tour of Nutrition Facts

All of the information in Nutrition Facts is based on a specific amount of food.

The Facts table lists Calories and these 13 core nutrients.

More nutrients may be listed on some labels.



Nutrition Facts

Per 125 mL (87 g)

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 80	
Fat 0.5 g	**1** %
Saturated 0 g + Trans 0 g	**0** %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 0 mg	**0** %
Carbohydrate 18 g	**6** %
Fibre 2 g	**8** %
Sugars 2 g	
Protein 3 g	

Vitamin A	2 %	Vitamin C	10 %
Calcium	0 %	Iron	2 %

Formats

The standard format (shown above) appears on most prepackaged foods, whenever there is enough label space. When space is insufficient, horizontal or linear formats can be used. For smaller packages, Nutrition Facts can appear on the inside of the food label, on an insert or on a tag. Very small packages must at least provide an indication of how consumers may obtain the information, such as through a postal address or toll-free number.

Basis of the Nutrient Information

The nutrient information in the Nutrition Facts table is based on a specific amount of the food. The energy value is provided in Calories. Most nutrients are provided in grams or milligrams, and as a percentage of a Daily Value based on a reference standard. Vitamins and minerals are expressed only as a percentage of a Daily Value based on a recommended daily intake. Nutrient values are rounded according to specific rules set by government.

Exemptions

The Nutrition Facts table appears on most prepackaged foods, but exemptions are allowed because it is difficult to provide labelling under certain conditions, such as:

- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Raw meat and poultry (except when ground), and raw fish and seafood
- Food products that are prepared from ingredients or from pre-mixes, or small amounts of food that have been packaged at the retail establishment and sold on site
  –examples are bakery items and sausages made at retail
- Products with insignificant amounts of all 13 core nutrients in a normal serving
  –examples are coffee beans, tea leaves, herbs and spices, and food colours
- Alcoholic beverages
- Foods sold at road-side stands, craft shows, flea markets, fairs, farmers' markets and sugar bushes by the same person who made them

These foods will lose their exempt status—and must display the Nutrition Facts table—if:

- Their label or advertisement has a nutrition claim (either nutrient content claim or health claim) or health-related proprietary mark of a third party (e.g., a heart symbol or name of a health group)
- Vitamins or minerals have been added
- Sweeteners such as aspartame have been added

Exempted foods may still have Nutrition Facts on the label. Consumers should be encouraged to look for and request this information. For example, information binders on the nutritional value of vegetables and fruit may be found near produce sections in grocery stores, and reference booklets on the nutrient content of products are sometimes available, on request, at restaurants.

Foods that are not prepackaged will not have a Nutrition Facts table. This includes foods that are served or sold in restaurants, cafeterias, take-outs; meats and cheeses sold at a deli counter; and many fresh fruit and vegetables (see the Questions and Answers for a more complete description of the exemptions).

What About Other Nutrients?

The core nutrients *must* be listed in the Nutrition Facts table, along with any other nutrients related to any nutrition claims on the package or any nutrients that have been added to the product. The Facts table does not include each and every nutrient present in the food. The absence of a "non-core" nutrient in the Facts table does not mean that the nutrient is not in the food.

Manufacturers *may* include, in the Nutrition Facts table, other nutrients from a defined list. Other vitamins, minerals, types of fat, sugar alcohols and starch are included in this list. Information on any other food constituent (e.g., phytochemicals such as isoflavone, or carotenoids such as lycopene) *may* appear **outside** the table.

Nutrition Claims

Nutrition claims include **nutrient content claims**, which describe the amount of a nutrient in a food, such as "reduced in fat," "very high source of fibre" or "source of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids." These usually appear on the front of food packages. Nutrition claims also include authorized **diet-related health claims**, which highlight a relationship between diet and a disease or condition, and are supported by sound scientific evidence. At the end of this background fact sheet series is a list of some common nutrition claims and their meanings (see section on "What Do Nutrition Claims Mean?").

A manufacturer can choose whether or not to include nutrition claims on the label. However, government regulations specify the **wording** of a claim that must be used to ensure that the claim is consistent and not misleading, as well as the **criteria** that a food has to meet to qualify for a claim. For example, regulations specify the amount of food on which the claim is based (so that foods, in a category, can be compared to one another), and the amount of the nutrient about which the claim is made ("low fat" means 3 g or less fat per stated amount of food). The regulations pertaining to nutrition claims apply to all foods, prepackaged and not prepackaged, no matter where they are sold.

List of Ingredients

Virtually all prepackaged foods must include a list of ingredients by weight, from most to least (those with the most weight are listed first). The ingredient list helps to identify sources of the nutrients and their relative importance in the food. This list is an important source of allergy information.

Enforcing the Regulations

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for enforcing the regulations and for encouraging and verifying industry compliance with them.

Using Labels to Make Informed Choices: Nutrition Facts, Ingredient List and Claims

Objective: To outline how to use the information in Nutrition Facts, the ingredient list and nutrition claims, how these pieces complement one another, and how they can help consumers make informed food choices.

Use Nutrition Facts, the ingredient list and nutrition claims to make informed food choices.

The Foundation

Nutrition Facts and the ***ingredient list*** are the foundation of label reading since together they provide an overview of what is in the food. They are present on most prepackaged foods. ***Nutrition claims*** are not always provided. When they are, they are highly visible and can highlight a specific aspect of the food which may be of interest to consumers.

Element	Features	Potential uses
Nutrition Facts	• Almost always present • Visible • Consistent "look"	• Evaluate a food's nutritional value • Compare nutritional quality of foods • Control intakes of specific nutrients, such as fat or sodium, in special diets
Ingredient list	• Almost always present	• Identify sources of certain nutrients and their relative importance in the food • Identify food allergens or meet cultural requirements
Nutrition claims	• Optional • Highly visible • Quick and easy	• A quick way to identify foods with a specific nutritional feature of interest • Health claims translate complex diet-health relationships into simple, relevant messages

Claims: Quick and Easy

Some consumers are skeptical of claims. Manufacturers have the choice of whether to provide them or not. Claims focus on the aspects of a food the manufacturer decides to highlight. When a claim is used, consumers can be reassured that the product meets certain criteria. This sometimes includes having an additional phrase on the product to explain the claim. For example, for the claim "light," manufacturers must describe what "light" refers to, such as reduced in fat.

Claims such as "free," "low" or "reduced" can signal that a food has less of a certain component, such as Calories, fat, saturated fat or sodium. Foods with these types of claims can help consumers moderate their intake of certain nutrients. Claims such as "good source" and "high" can help identify foods that contain important amounts of fibre, vitamins and minerals.

A list of some common nutrition claims and what they mean appears at the end of this background fact sheet series.

Check the Facts

Nutrition claims are a tool that manufacturers can use to bring attention to positive features of their food products. However, claims usually highlight one nutrient of a food and are optional. To assess the overall value of a food, consumers need to be directed to read Nutrition Facts and the ingredient list, which do appear on most prepackaged foods. For example, a product that is low in sodium or high in fibre may still be higher in fat than expected. And "fat-free" products may be high in Calories. The information on serving size (the specific amount of food listed in Nutrition Facts) is key.

Activity–Carbohydrate Counting for People with Diabetes

People with diabetes generally need to control their intake of Calories, carbohydrate, sodium and fat.

- Provide a series of similar food products of interest to participants, such as different types of cereals or breads.
- Ask them to locate the amount of carbohydrate in the Nutrition Facts table. Remind them that this is the key number they need to know so that they can integrate the products into their diets. Inform them that the total amount of "carbohydrate" listed on the label includes starch, fibre and sugars.
- Have participants compare the total carbohydrate content in similar products. Note that the specific amount of food listed is important information–the amount of carbohydrate applies to that serving of food only. For example, 4 cookies of one type may have the same amount of carbohydrate as 6 cookies of another kind. And eating twice as many cookies as listed doubles the amount of carbohydrate.
- Remind participants that other label information is important to the management of their condition, including Calories, sodium, saturated fat and *trans* fat. For example, a snack food that is higher in fat or sodium could be chosen less often.

- Direct them to consult the list of ingredients and the Nutrition Facts to assess claims for relevant information. For example, a jam that is "reduced in Calories" can be compared to the same brand's regular product or products with a claim of "no sugar added" and "sugar-free."

Case Study—Making an Informed Choice

John is shopping for crackers and picks up two types from the grocery store shelf. He is most interested in the information on fat, fibre and salt. The wheat cracker lists boldly on the front of the package "low fat" and "a source of dietary fibre." The vegetable-type cracker has no claims. So he looks to the Nutrition Facts tables to get the details.

- The wheat cracker indicates the % Daily Values for a serving of 4 crackers (20 grams): 5% for fat, 4% for saturated + *trans* fats, 8% for fibre and 4% for sodium. He notices that whole wheat is the first ingredient.
- The vegetable-type cracker indicates the % Daily Values for a serving of 13 crackers (20 grams): 8% for fat, 8% for saturated + *trans* fats, 4% for fibre and 6% for sodium.

Because the specific amount of food on which the Facts are based is the same (20 grams), he can compare the % Daily Values of the products without the need for calculations.

He decides to choose the wheat cracker as it is lower in total fat, saturated + *trans* fats, lower in sodium and higher in fibre, and watch his portion size. Next time, he may choose the vegetable-type cracker but will try lower fat toppings and still watch his portion size.

(Note that an alternative example could be chosen to demonstrate foods that are not grain products, such as combination dishes, soups or puddings.)

A Closer Look at Serving Size Information

Objective: To describe the relevance of the specific amount of food on which the nutrient information is based (serving size listed in the Nutrition Facts table), in order for consumers to understand and use Nutrition Facts.

Nutrition Facts are based on a specific amount of food—compare this to the amount you eat.

What is a "specific amount of food"?

1. A specific amount of food is shown under the Nutrition Facts heading.
2. The amount may be indicated by the phrase "per (naming the serving size)," "serving size" or "serving."
3. All nutrient information in the Nutrition Facts table is given for that specific amount of the food.
4. The amount is provided in familiar household units–such as cups, tablespoons, or a fraction or unit of food (1/4 pizza, 1 slice of bread)–followed by the metric measure (g, mL).

Sometimes, the nutrient information is also provided for the food "as prepared" (e.g., cake mix prepared with an egg).

Except for individual sized packages, manufacturers can choose the specific amount of food that is listed in Nutrition Facts ***within*** a given range set in guidelines. This range is based on a "Reference Amount" of food. The Reference Amount is a specific regulated quantity, for each type of food, which reflects an amount people usually eat, at one sitting. When similar products have similar serving sizes then product comparison is relatively easy. However, since serving sizes may be different, it is important to refer to the specific amount listed in Nutrition Facts when comparing products.

Case Study—Label Serving Size/Nutrition Facts Link

The information in Nutrition Facts describes the nutrient content of a specific amount, or serving, of food. Consumers can compare the portion they eat with the specific amount on the label to "personalize" the nutrient information.

Georges is a very active 19-year-old man who always has a ready-to-eat cereal for a bedtime snack. His favourite cereal bowl is his grandma's 1-litre (4-cup) measuring cup, which he fills up to the 450 mL mark to allow enough room for 250 mL of milk. Georges enjoys several types of cereal and is curious to know how many Calories of each he is consuming.

Product	Nutrition Facts serving size	Calories	What is Georges' Calorie intake? (*without milk*)
Honey Oat Cereal	250 mL (30 g)	120 Calories	216 Calories
Granola Cereal	125 mL (59 g)	229 Calories	824 Calories

Georges sees that the nutrient information on the label is provided for a specific amount of food. A 250-mL cup of the Honey Oat Cereal has 120 Calories. As he consumes 450 mL, he knows he is getting almost two times that amount, or about 216 Calories. The big surprise is the Granola Cereal: 125 mL has 229 Calories. So, when he chooses it as his snack, for the amount he eats, he is consuming 824 Calories (plus the Calories from milk). He decides to go for the Honey Oat Cereal and sprinkles a few spoonfuls of the Granola Cereal on it.

The amount of food stated in the Nutrition Facts table is NOT a recommended serving size
The specific amounts used for nutrition labelling are not always the same as the serving sizes in *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* because they have different purposes. The specific amount used in nutrition labelling (and the serving size for a food in the Food Guide) may be different from the portion that consumers actually eat. Some consumers may believe that the serving size on the label represents the amount they should consume; others may not understand why the amount is not realistic for them, as an individual.

Canada's Food Guide…	Nutrition Facts…	What consumers eat…
Promotes optimal intake through a combination of recommended *number* of servings and serving *sizes* … So consumers can easily remember what counts as a serving and use those amounts to visually estimate the quantity of food being eaten Example: The Food Guide recommends 5 to 10 servings of Vegetables & Fruit per day –a serving of juice is 125 mL or 1/2 cup	Include Calorie and nutrient information based on reasonable amounts consumed at one time … So Calorie and nutrient information are based on a realistic serving size for labelling purposes Example: The amount of juice on which the nutrient information is usually based is 250 mL or 1 cup	Actual serving sizes vary because energy needs vary according to age, body size, activity level and gender … So consumers should compare the amount they usually consume to the amount of food stated under Nutrition Facts Example: Actual serving sizes for juice vary from 125 mL to 500 mL

Activity

Prepare a display of various measuring tools and food products to demonstrate–and compare differences between–the serving sizes in Nutrition Facts, the Food Guide and people's usual serving sizes.

Another variation of the activity is to have people look at sample amounts of a food (or beverage) and ask them to guess the quantity. Then measure and compare with the amount listed in the Nutrition Facts table and the amount they might consume. Discuss the results.

A Word About Individual-sized Packages

For packages that tend to be consumed as one portion (e.g., small containers of yogurt, individual-size packs of peanuts, juice-boxes), the nutrient information applies to the whole package so that it better reflects how those individual-sized packages are used. This may not cover all packages which are consumed as a single serving.

Tip: Always look at the specific amount of food on which the nutrient information is based and compare it to the amount you eat.

A Closer Look at % Daily Value

Objective: To provide a detailed look at the % Daily Value (% DV), a simple benchmark for evaluating the nutrient content of foods quickly and easily.

Use % Daily Value to see if a food has a lot or a little of a nutrient.

What Is % Daily Value?

In the Nutrition Facts table, vitamins and minerals are expressed as a percentage of a Daily Value (% DV). Fat, saturated + *trans* fats, carbohydrate and fibre are expressed by weight (grams) and also as a percentage of a Daily Value (% DV). For cholesterol, the % DV is optional and will sometimes be present in the Nutrition Facts table (but the amount of cholesterol by weight, in milligrams, will be listed). The % DV allows a quick and easy evaluation of a food's nutritional value. It reflects how much of a specific nutrient a food contains relative to a Daily Value.

- The Daily Values developed for nutrition labelling are generally based on recommendations for a healthy diet. The key is that all consumers can use the % DV as a benchmark, whether their individual requirements are more or less than the Daily Value or whether or not they know their nutrient requirements. Daily Values refer to both the Recommended Daily Intakes for vitamins and minerals and the Reference Standards for the other nutrients. The lists of Daily Values (Reference Standards and Recommended Daily Intakes) can be found in the Food and Drug regulations.

  The actual amounts (g or mg) listed for nutrients may be useful for those with specific dietary needs.

How Is % DV Derived?

The Example of Iron…

- The Daily Value for iron is 14 mg.
- To get the % DV, the actual amount of iron, in one stated label serving, is divided by the Daily Value and multiplied by 100. A product with 2 mg of iron, per stated label serving, would have a % DV of about 15%.
- The Daily Values for vitamins and minerals are based on the 1983 Recommended Nutrient Intakes for Canadians, and represent the highest recommended intake for each age/sex group, not including supplemental needs for pregnancy and breastfeeding.

The Example of Fat…

It is recommended that a healthy diet should not provide more than 30% of Calories as fat.

- For the 2000-Calorie reference diet, this means 65 g of fat.
- The fat content of the food is expressed on the label as a percentage of 65 g.
- A product with 16 g of fat would have a % DV of 25%.

The recommendations for some nutrients are a fixed number that applies regardless of age, gender or caloric intake. In these cases, the Daily Value is that fixed number (e.g., the Daily Value for sodium is 2,400 mg).

How to Use % DV for…

Quick Product Evaluation

The % DV indicates whether there is a lot or a little of a nutrient in a stated amount of a food.

- Consumers can see whether the nutrients they are trying to increase (e.g., fibre, vitamins A and C, calcium, iron) have high percentages.
- Consumers can see whether the nutrients they are trying to decrease (e.g., saturated + *trans* fats, cholesterol, sodium) have low percentages.

Making Comparisons

The % DV provides a quick overview of the nutrient profile of the food, allowing product comparisons based on more than one nutrient.

- It puts nutrients on the same scale (0%-100% DV), much like a ruler.
- Consumers can quickly identify strengths and weaknesses of a product.

  Examples:

  - A food that has a % DV of 5% or less for fat, sodium or cholesterol would be low in these nutrients
  - A food that has a % DV of 10% or less for saturated + *trans* fats would be low in these nutrients
  - A food that has a % DV of 15% or more for calcium, iron or fibre would be high in these nutrients

Adjustments

The % DV indicates if adjustments in food selection are needed.

- Foods that are high in a nutrient are easily recognizable.
- % DV can help consumers identify when they need to make adjustments in other foods they choose or decrease the amount that they eat.

Special Dietary Needs

The % DV highlights sources of key nutrients.

- Health professionals can identify daily targets for their clients using the % DV–for example, to consume three excellent sources (>25% DV) of calcium per day, taking into account the fact that other food or food products will provide a certain amount as well.

Activity—Reinforcing % Daily Value

Objective: To learn to make judgements about whether a serving of food is high or low in certain nutrients.

The value of % DV is reinforced by trying to do the exercise based first on nutrient weight (g or mg) only, then by comparing % DV.

Using sample products, have participants refer to the Nutrition Facts and focus on fat and sodium (listed in g or mg as well as % DV).

Describe the two ways of expressing nutrient information–by weight (g or mg) and % DV.

Have participants cover the % DV column and ask them to try to judge whether the product is high or low in certain nutrients based on the weights only. What is the amount of food on which the nutrient information is based? Look at the grams of fat, does the number look high or low? What about when participants look at the % DV? Look at sodium as an alternative nutrient.

Nutrient information presented only in grams or milligrams may be confusing. For example, small numbers may be viewed as insignificant and large numbers as significant. So, 110 mg of sodium (a large number) is only 5% of the Daily Value and 10 g of fat (a small number) is 15% of the Daily Value.

You May Have Noticed…	Why?
One combined % DV for saturated + *trans* fats	Both types of fat have negative effects on blood cholesterol levels which increase the risk of coronary heart disease
Optional % DV for cholesterol	Cholesterol: while it is a risk factor for heart disease, a reduction in saturated fat, which is found in meat and dairy products, will be accompanied by a reduction in cholesterol intake
No % DV for sugars and protein	Sugars: there is no generally accepted target recommendation for the healthy population Protein: intakes are generally adequate, and not a public health concern for Canadians who have access to a mixed diet
Vitamins and minerals (other than sodium and potassium) listed only as % DV	These nutrients are usually expressed in different units like RE and μg, so using % DV makes it easier for consumers to understand the relative amounts present in the product

Only the Daily Values for carbohydrates, total fat and saturated + *trans* fats are based on a 2000-Calorie diet because the recommendations for those nutrients are related to energy (Calorie) intake. The footnote "Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000-Calorie diet" is optional and may appear in the Nutrition Facts table. A 2000-Calorie diet is about right for moderately active women, teenage girls and sedentary men.

Nutrition Labelling and Healthy Eating

Objective: To provide a framework for using the nutrition information on food labels to support healthy eating.

Use Nutrition Facts, the ingredient list and nutrition claims to make informed food choices.

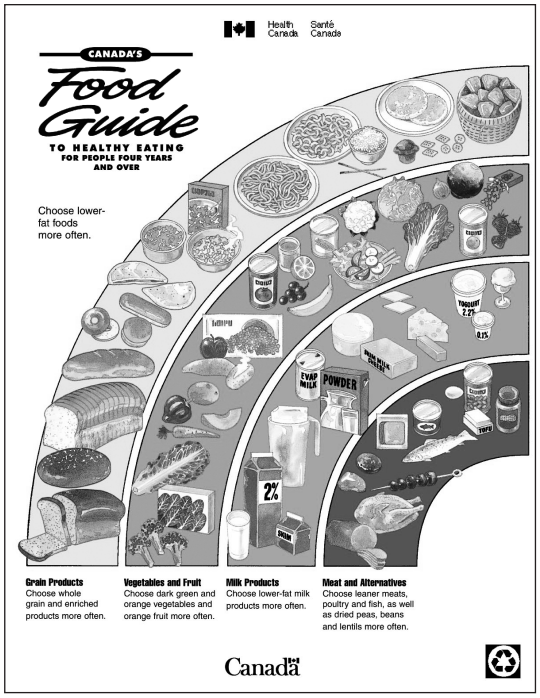
Food is one of life's great pleasures, and enjoying food is part of healthy eating. Food is a part of celebrations with family and friends. It nourishes the body. It provides energy to get through each day. The right balance of food and activity helps one stay at a healthy body weight.

Nutrition labelling provides the opportunity to highlight and to revitalize healthy eating programs and messages. Nutrition labelling helps complete the full circle for healthy eating: Nutrition Recommendations, which are science-based nutrient recommendations ⟶ to Canada's Guidelines for Healthy Eating, which translate the science to food-based messages ⟶ to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, which helps people act upon these messages by making wise food choices ⟶ to Nutrition Labelling, which provides nutrient-related information to help make food choices.

Making the Leap to Food

Canada's Guidelines for Healthy Eating…

- Enjoy a VARIETY of foods.
- Emphasize cereals, breads, other grain products, vegetables and fruit.
- Choose lower fat dairy products, leaner meats and foods prepared with little or no fat.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight by enjoying regular physical activity and healthy eating.
- Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine.



Translated into a Guide to Action

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating…

Is a flexible guide that suggests a way of eating for people over the age of 4 and gives advice on how to choose foods.

The Science

The Nutrition Recommendations

- Energy intake consistent with maintenance of healthy body weight
- Essential nutrients in amounts recommended
- No more than 30% of energy as fat and no more than 10% as saturated fat
- 55% of energy as carbohydrate from a variety of sources
- Sodium content of the diet should be reduced
- No more than 5% of total energy as alcohol, or 2 drinks daily, whichever is less
- No more caffeine than the equivalent of 4 regular cups of coffee per day
- Fluoridate community water supplies containing less than 1 mg/L to that level

The Label-Healthy Eating Link

Nutrition labelling is a practical tool that helps Canadians choose foods.

It provides nutrient-specific information about prepackaged foods so that consumers can compare similar products and make informed choices.

Some Canadians may need to **limit** their intake of a nutrient, such as fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat, sodium… and others may need to **increase** their intake of a nutrient, such as fibre, vitamin A, calcium, iron...

Linking the label information to Food Guide messages can help focus consumers' attention on healthy eating, as a whole, and prevent them from getting caught up in making choices only based on a particular nutrient.

From the Food Guide…

"… Enjoy a variety of foods from each group every day"

- Eat different kinds of foods, prepared in different ways.
- Explore a wide range of foods with different tastes, textures and colours.
- Variety ensures an adequate intake of essential nutrients.

"… Enjoy eating well, being active and feeling good about yourself"

- Healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight by enjoying regular physical activity and healthy eating.
- Energy and nutrient needs vary, depending on age, body size, gender and activity level, and special conditions such as pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- Portion sizes influence the number of Calories and amount of fat consumed.

Food label elements:	Some helpful information:
Nutrition Facts	• Nutrient information, including Calories, is based on a specific amount of food

"… Choose lower fat foods more often"

- Each of the four food groups includes foods that contain fat.
- Eat lower fat foods from each group every day.
- Choose smaller amounts of higher fat foods.

Food label elements:	Some helpful information:
Nutrition Facts	• Fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat
Nutrition claims	• Low fat, reduced in saturated fat, *trans* fat-free • Health claim on saturated and *trans* fats and heart disease
Ingredient list	• Sources of fat

"… Grain Products"

- Choose whole grain and enriched grain products more often.
- Whole grain products, such as whole wheat, oats, barley or rye, are suggested because they are high in starch and fibre.

Food label elements:	Some helpful information:
Nutrition Facts	• Fibre, sugars, iron, fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat, sodium
Nutrition claims	• Source of fibre, high in iron
Ingredient list	• Sources of whole grains, such as oats and whole wheat flour • Enriched grains will also include nutrients which have been added back to them (iron, niacin, riboflavin, thiamin and folic acid)

"… Vegetables and Fruit"

- Choose dark green and orange vegetables and orange fruit more often. These foods are higher than other vegetables and fruit in certain key nutrients like vitamin A and folate.
- Fresh, frozen and canned are all good choices.

Food label elements:	Some helpful information:
Nutrition Facts	• Fibre, vitamin A, vitamin C, sodium
Nutrition claims	• Source of fibre/iron, excellent source of vitamin A/vitamin C • Health claim on vegetables and fruit and reduced risk of some types of cancer • Health claim on potassium, sodium and reduced risk of high blood pressure
Ingredient list	• Check list of ingredients when consuming prepared foods • Check if vegetables and fruit are near the beginning of the list

"… Milk Products"

- Choose lower fat milk products more often.
- Take advantage of the wide variety of lower fat milk products as a way to lower total dietary fat, particularly saturated fat.

Food label elements:	Some helpful information:
Nutrition Facts	• Fat, saturated and *trans* fats, calcium, vitamin D
Nutrition claims	• Good source of calcium, low in fat • Health claim on calcium, vitamin D and regular physical activity and reduced risk of osteoporosis • Health claim on saturated and *trans* fats and heart disease
Ingredient list	• Other ingredients, such as salt (sodium) added to cheese

"… Meat and Alternatives"

- Choose leaner meats, poultry and fish, as well as dried peas, beans and lentils more often.
- To lower your fat while increasing your intake of starch and fibre, choose foods like beans, peas or lentils.

Food label elements:	Some helpful information:
Nutrition Facts	• Fat, saturated and *trans* fats, cholesterol, sodium
Nutrition claims	• Low in fat, good source of iron • Health claim on saturated and *trans* fats and heart disease
Ingredient list	• Other ingredients such as sources of added fat

"**… Other Foods** are foods and beverages that are **not part of any food group.**"

- Some of these foods are higher in fat or Calories, so use these foods in moderation.
- They include foods that are mostly fats and oils; foods that are mostly sugar; high-fat and/or high-salt snack foods; beverages, such as water, tea, coffee, alcohol and soft drinks; herbs and spices; and condiments.

Food label elements:	**Some helpful information:**
Nutrition Facts	• Calories, fat, saturated and *trans* fats, sugars and sodium
Nutrition claims	• Reduced in Calories, low in fat, lower in sodium • Health claim on potassium, sodium and reduced risk of high blood pressure
Ingredient list	• If fats, salt or sugars are near the beginning, then see Nutrition Facts

Case Study—Helping Individuals Achieve Health Goals

Jane is a 45-year-old woman who wants to reduce her risk of developing osteoporosis.

From the **Food Guide**, she knows to choose 2-4 servings of milk products each day, and to focus on lower fat products.

She can always look to the **Nutrition Facts** information for products with a % DV for calcium that is higher than 15%, as well as for vitamin D.

To meet her nutrient needs without consuming too many Calories, she needs to aim for the lower fat, lower Calorie choices more often. She can check the total fat, saturated fat and *trans* fat content to help assess if products are appropriate for her. She knows that the lower the % M.F. or % B.F., the lower the fat content, and she can choose the products with a lower % DV for fat, more often.

Jane knows that some products, such as the specialty cheese she gets from the deli counter, do not carry nutrition information. But she has noticed that this information was posted by the counter. She also finds useful a brochure on osteoporosis from a public health clinic, providing easy-to-use tables on the calcium content of various foods.

She also recalls the healthy living message to enjoy eating well, *being active* and feeling good about herself. She decides to ask a friend to join her on a daily lunch-time walk.

Activity—Labelling Clues

To identify label information that can help Canadians to follow healthy eating messages:

1. Ask participants if they have healthy eating goals, and what they are.
2. Select and provide participants with food labels that include nutrition information (Nutrition Facts table, some with extra nutrients in addition to the core list; and at least one with a nutrition claim).
3. Ask them to brainstorm to identify the label elements that would help in meeting their goals.

The Consumer Perspective

Objective: To outline trends in consumer knowledge, attitudes and behaviour related to consumer food choices and the use of nutrition labels.

Health and nutrition information is widely available to consumers, and creates a context for using food labels. Food labels are a valuable source of product-specific nutrition information at the point-of-purchase–a tool to help consumers make food choices consistent with their dietary goals.

But information alone does not change behaviour; consumer motivations, concerns and barriers are also critical factors. Consumers use nutrition information on food labels in many different ways. Effective education starts from the consumers' perspective.

Impact on Food Choices—A Historical Look

Nutrition information on food labels plays an important role in purchase decisions for almost three-quarters of Canadians.[1,2] Almost all (93%) want to see such information provided on all or most foods.[1] However, consumers have varied skills in finding sought-after information, and understanding and relating it to their nutrition decisions. Insights can be gained from studies that report on the use and understanding of nutrition labelling prior to the legislation that made it mandatory.

Nutrient Information

- Most (70%) Canadians indicated that they refer to the nutrition information panel on food products.[1]
- Highest use was reported among women[1,3] and those with higher levels of income[1] and education.[1,3]
- Of those who did not use the information, 40% said they are already familiar with the products they buy; about one-quarter indicated that it takes too much time to read; 22% were not interested.[1]

Canadians Used the Label to…

- See whether the product is rich in nutrients or ingredients they are trying to eat more of (74%).[3]
- See whether the product contains certain nutrients or ingredients they are trying to eat less of or avoid (73%).[3]
- Assess the Calorie content (62%).[3]
- Compare similar (76%) or different (74%) types of foods.[1]

The Other Elements

- Nutrient content claims were used most often and perceived by consumers as the information provided on food packaging that they understood very well.[4]
- Health claims should be most effective for those who trust product labels, have basic nutrition knowledge and are most aware of the nutrient-disease relationship mentioned in the message.[5]

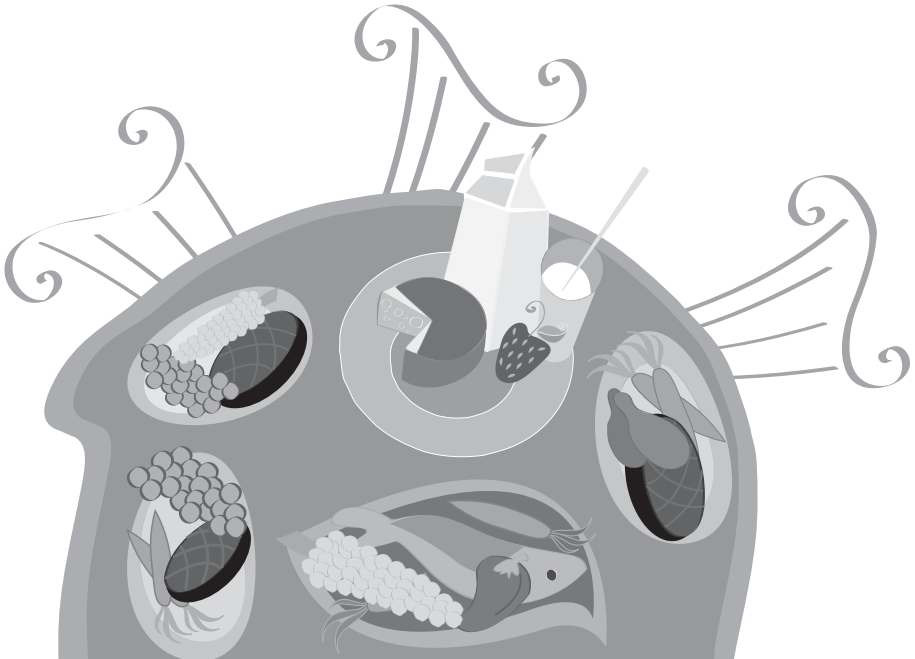
Evidence of Misunderstanding

- Although 83% claimed some understanding of the nutrition panel information, only 43% believed they understood it very well.[1]
- Consumers complained of complexity,[6] lack of clarity and difficulty understanding nutrient terminology,[2] insufficient or misleading information and difficulty reading the information.[1]
- Lack of use and understanding of serving size information was a barrier to correct use of the label information.[1]
- There was confusion about % Recommended Daily Intake–RDI (now % DV). When provided with a brief explanation of % RDI more than two-thirds of Canadians claimed their understanding of it improved.[1]

Current labelling regulations and education attempt to address the difficulties and barriers that consumers faced in the past.

Insights from the United States

The introduction of a mandatory, consistent nutrition label in the United States in 1994 offers an opportunity to foresee the potential of Canada's new label. The US label appears to be having an impact on Americans' food purchase decisions.[7-10]



Signs of success	Limitations and challenges
More people said they changed their minds about buying or using a food product because they read the label (48% in 1995 versus 30% in 1990).[8]	The extent to which education materials and programs have reached consumers and helped them to make effective use of the label is not known.[9]
Almost three-quarters (72%) rated the new label better than the old label[9] as it: • Was easier to read, more clear and understandable • Provided the types of information wanted	Specific uses of the label may be declining,[7, 12] signifying the need for continual messages to consumers: fewer indicated in 1997 (27%) than in 1995 (33%) that they "pay very close attention to labels."[7]
Frequent use of the quantitative nutrient information was reported by 30% more people.[8] The uses increasing most were: • To see how high or low the product was in specific nutrients • To look at nutritional content overall • To compare different food items	In 1999, 56% of products had no claims; 40% had nutrient content claims; only 4% had health claims.[9]
Consumers seemed able to use the % DV information appropriately to compare products even if they did not fully understand it.[9]	Consumers showed limited awareness that nutrition claims are regulated, and are still skeptical of health claims.[9]
Label use was significantly associated with lower fat intake.[11]	

Nutrition Facts is a tool that can help consumers make more informed choices. Educators can help consumers better use the information on food labels to meet their needs.

Influences on Food Choice

Nutrition and health are top concerns for almost 90% of Canadians when they make food and eating decisions–with only taste ranking higher.[13] Three-quarters (73%) say they choose or avoid certain foods because they are concerned about their health.[14] And their concerns about what is in food have risen over the last decade.[3]

Taking Action

Canadians report making changes in their buying and eating practices.

- Almost two-thirds (62%) of Canadians say they have made some changes over the past year to improve their eating habits–mainly to consume less fat, eat more fruit and vegetables and reduce their sugar intake.[3]
- Most of those who express concern about fat,[2, 15] starch,[15] fibre[2, 15] or calcium[2] claim to be acting on their concern.

Only 38% of Canadians rate their diets as very good or excellent,[3] and the eating patterns of many still contribute to the high incidence of nutrition-related chronic diseases.

Canadians' Key Nutrition Concerns[3]

In 2001, more than two-thirds expressed some concern about:
fat, vitamins, saturated fat, fibre, protein, calcium, cholesterol, Calories/energy, sugar, salt/sodium, carbohydrates and iron.
• **All** of those concerns are addressed through the Nutrition Facts, as core nutrients.

Integrating nutrition labelling education into healthy eating programs will put the label information into a broader context.

Challenges to Healthy Eating—A Complex Process

Food purchase decisions involve a complex process: choosing among new products, old favourites and treats; balancing nutrition, taste, time, convenience, variety and price. The task is especially difficult while hungry or in a hurry, and without advance planning for shopping or meals. Canadians need to be able to make quick and informed decisions in the store to ensure that they have healthy choices on hand.

- Over half of Canadians who prepare supper at home make their meal choices the same day, even at the last minute.[13]
- Some 80% of shoppers make a list, but only about one-quarter stick to it.[6]
- Women generally make the decisions about what is eaten at home: the vast majority of primary grocery shoppers are women.[6]

Challenges to Healthy Eating—The Time Crunch

Time pressures on families can translate into increased consumption of prepared foods and restaurant meals. Large portion sizes and marketing of prepared and convenience foods can influence food choices and eating patterns.

- More than two thirds (68%) of Canadians feel short of time, an increase of 22% since 1997.[16]
- About 13% say they do not have time to prepare a nutritious meal.[16]
- Almost three quarters (74%) of employed Canadians and 56% of homemakers eat in a hurry because of a busy schedule.[13]
- At least once a week, 39% of employed Canadians and 26% of homemakers eat in a car or other vehicle.[13]
- Canadians spend just less than one third of the food budget on eating out and on restaurant take-out foods.[17]
- The average main grocery trip lasts about 45 minutes and consists of about 30 items.[13]

Canadians are looking for clear guidance on food choices and over half are tired of conflicting messages and complex information.[13]

The ***four key nutrition labelling messages*** are designed to make consumers aware of the new nutrition information on food labels and draw attention to two important elements of the Nutrition Facts table–serving size and % Daily Value (% DV). These messages are starting points for introducing the new nutrition information on food labels and can be used to provide consistent messages to consumers.

Key Messages to Guide Nutrition Labelling Education

1. Nutrition Facts: easy to find, easy to read, and on more foods.
2. Use Nutrition Facts, the ingredient list and nutrition claims to make informed food choices.
3. Nutrition Facts are based on a specific amount of food–compare this to the amount you eat.
4. Use % Daily Value to see if a food has a lot or a little of a nutrient.

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Examples of Integrating Nutrition Labelling into Program Interventions

Maya, a nutrition educator, is revising her group presentations to include nutrition labelling information. Here are some ideas on how she intends to introduce the topic with her three very different audiences.

Prenatal Class

Audience Profile

- Mostly single moms
- Many teenagers with multiple social barriers
- Low income
- Nutrition is not top concern, but motivated by pregnancy

Communication level

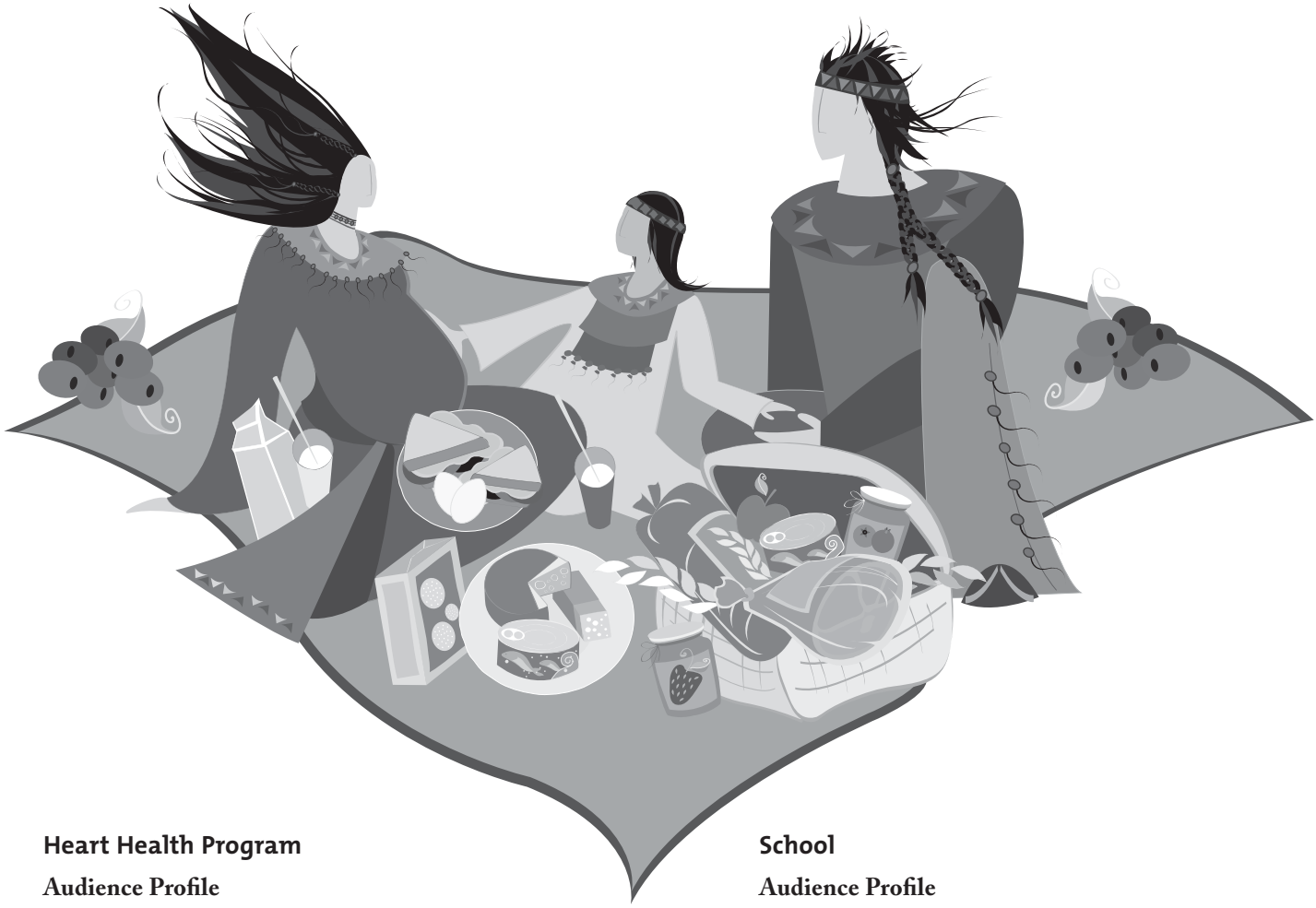
- Simple, clear messages
- Use more pictures than words
- Provide easy-to-read resources

Nutrition/health focus

- Calcium/vitamin D
- Iron
- Calories
- Fibre
- Folate
- *Vitality* (eating well, being active and feeling good about yourself)
- Avoidance of alcohol

Labelling features

- Nutrition Facts (% DV)
- Related nutrient content claims



Heart Health Program

Audience Profile

- Workplace program
- Male and female participants aged 45-55
- Well educated
- Higher literacy
- High interest in nutrition

Communication level

- Progressive, clear messages to reach the well-informed audience
- Provide more detailed resources

Nutrition/health focus

- Calories
- Fat; saturated and *trans* fats
- Cholesterol
- Fibre
- Sodium and potassium
- Alcohol in moderation
- Active living

Labelling Features

- Nutrition Facts (% DV)
- Related nutrient content claims
- Health claims on sodium and potassium and hypertension; saturated and *trans* fats and heart disease

School

Audience Profile

- Grade 8 students
- Middle-income area
- Computer literate

Communication level

- Limited to what is most relevant to a young audience
- Make good use of electronic media to capture attention
- Take an interactive approach using games and discussion groups

Nutrition/health focus

- Active living
- Iron (young women)
- Calcium/vitamin D
- Variety of foods

Labelling features

- Nutrition Facts (% DV)
- Related nutrient content claims

What Do Nutrition Claims Mean?

Consumers can have confidence in nutrition claims because regulations, from Health Canada, specify the criteria that a food must meet to qualify for a claim, and regulations specify the wording that must be used in nutrition claims to ensure that they are consistent and not misleading.

Nutrient Content Claims and Their Meaning

This table provides a list of some of the more common nutrient content claims and what they mean.

Key words	What they mean
Free	**An amount of a nutrient so small, health experts consider it nutritionally insignificant**
Sodium-free	• Less than 5 mg of sodium*
Cholesterol-free	• Less than 2 mg of cholesterol, and low in saturated fat (includes a restriction on *trans* fat)* • not necessarily low in total fat
Low	**Always associated with a very small amount of a nutrient**
Low fat	• 3 g or less of fat*
Low in saturated fat	• 2 g or less of saturated and *trans* fats combined*
Reduced	**At least 25% less of a nutrient compared with a similar product**
Reduced in Calories	• At least 25% less energy than the food to which it is compared
Source	**Always associated with a "significant" amount**
Source of fibre	• 2 g or more of fibre*
Good source of calcium	• 165 mg or more of calcium*
Light	**When referring to a nutritional characteristic of a product, it is allowed only on foods that are either "reduced in fat" or "reduced in energy" (Calories)** • Explanation on the label of what makes the food "light"; this is also true if "light" refers to sensory characteristics, such as "light in colour"**

* Per reference amount and per serving of stated size (specific amount of food listed in Nutrition Facts)

** Three exceptions that do not require an explanation are "light maple syrup," "light rum" and "light salted" with respect to fish. Note that a separate provision is made for the claim "lightly salted" which may be used when a food contains at least 50% less added sodium compared with a similar product.

Other Key Points

- A food with a claim about saturated fat or cholesterol must also be restricted in *trans* fat.
- New claims are allowed for *trans* fat and for omega-6 and omega-3 polyunsaturated fats.

Diet-related Health Claims

To make a health claim about …	the food …
• Potassium, sodium and reduced risk of high blood pressure	• Must be low in (or free of) sodium • May also be high in potassium • Must be low in saturated fatty acids • Must be limited in alcohol • Must have more than 40 Calories if the food is not a vegetable or a fruit • Must have a minimum amount of at least one vitamin or mineral
• Calcium, vitamin D and regular physical activity, and reduced risk of osteoporosis	• Must be high (or very high) in calcium • May also be very high in vitamin D • Cannot have more phosphorus than calcium • Must be limited in alcohol • Must have more than 40 Calories if the food is not a vegetable or a fruit
• Saturated and *trans* fats and reduced risk of heart disease	• Must be low in (or free of) saturated fat and *trans* fat • Must be limited in cholesterol, sodium and alcohol • Must have more than 40 Calories if the food is not a vegetable or a fruit • Must have a minimum amount of at least one vitamin or mineral • Must, if it is a fat or an oil, be a source of omega-3 or omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acids
• Vegetables and fruit and reduced risk of some types of cancers	• Must be a fresh, frozen, dried or canned fruit or vegetable; fruit juice; vegetable juice • Must be limited in alcohol

Examples of Health Claims

A healthy diet rich in a variety of vegetables and fruit may help reduce the risk of some types of cancer.

A healthy diet low in saturated and *trans* fats may reduce the risk of heart disease. (Naming the food) is low in saturated and *trans* fats.