LOOK AT THE LABEL

By Susan Bowerman, M.S., R.D., C.S.S.D.

One of the most important skills you can master is being able to read a food label in order to figure out exactly what you are getting from your foods. Let’s look at an example and take the information from top to bottom...

### NUTRITION INFORMATION

**SERVINGS PER PACKAGE:** 2  
**SERVING SIZE:** 265G

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AVG QUANTITY PER SERVING</th>
<th>AVG QUANTITY PER 100G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENERGY</td>
<td>770KJ</td>
<td>290KJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROTEIN</td>
<td>7.3g</td>
<td>2.8g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAT, TOTAL</td>
<td>7.6g</td>
<td>2.9g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SATURATED</td>
<td>3.8g</td>
<td>1.4g</td>
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<tr>
<td>CARBOHYDRATE</td>
<td>19.9g</td>
<td>7.5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SUGARS</td>
<td>6.4g</td>
<td>2.4g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIETARY FIBRE</td>
<td>2.8g</td>
<td>1.0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SODIUM</td>
<td>775mg</td>
<td>295mg</td>
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</table>

**Serving Size and Servings per Package:**
Pay attention to this closely. Many people assume that small packages of biscuits or crackers, or medium-sized cans and sachets are single servings. But this may not be the case. The nutrition facts on a label are for one serving and also per 100g, which may not necessarily be the package size. In this example, the package contains two servings of 265g each in a 535g can of Big ‘N Chunky Soup Corn & Bacon Chowder. If you consume the whole can, then you will need to double all the information from the per serving information to determine exactly what you are taking in.

For drinks, it becomes more complicated. If a packaged beverage is sold in a container that is marketed for consumption as a single serve then the total content of that packaged beverage should be deemed as the serving size. For example if a water-based beverage (eg. fizzy drink, sports drink, ready to drink tea etc.) is sold in a 375mL can or a 600mL bottle and marketed for consumption as a single serve, then the serving size for purposes of calculating any dietary advice will be either 375mL or 600mL as appropriate. In the case of fruit juice, the maximum single serve is deemed to be 500mL.

For beverages sold in multi-serve packs, for example a 1.25L bottle, the Australian Beverages Council recommends to its members that the appropriate measure for the calculation of a serving size should be 250mL. This is based on the size of a standard Australian water drinking glass.
Calories, Fat, Carbohydrate and Protein:
As with all the other nutrients, these are the amounts per serving. In the example above, one serving of the soup has 770kJ (184 calories). But if you consume the whole package (two servings), you will have taken in 1540kJ (368 calories). In addition to the ‘Total Fat’, the label also tells you how much of this fat is saturated fat. The more solid (saturated) a fat is, the more difficulty your body has in digesting it, and because of this, the more likely it is to be deposited and stored in your body.

Carbohydrate’ tells you, again, how much carbohydrate per serving. Keep in mind that this includes natural sources, such as the natural sugars in milk or fruit, so it’s not always easy to tell from the line labelled ‘Sugars’ exactly where the sugar is coming from without looking at the ingredients list. If a cereal has little added sugar – but contains raisins – the sugar content may look high, but it’s just from the natural fruit sugar.

Check on the ingredients list for sugar. Added sugars must be included in the ingredients list, which always starts with the biggest ingredient first. Watch out for other words that are used to describe added sugars, such as sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltose, hydrolysed starch and invert sugar, corn syrup and honey. If you see one of these near the top of the list, you know that the product is likely to be high in added sugars. Sometimes food manufacturers use a number of sweeteners in a product – each in small amounts – so the ingredients are ‘sprinkled’ throughout the ingredients list, but taken together they can sometimes add up significantly.

For ‘Dietary Fibre’ - a food with 5 grams or more of fibre per serving is considered to be a good source of fibre.

% Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI):
You will sometimes see RDI listed on food labels. These values are standard values developed for use on food labels and are used to compare the amount of a nutrient in a food to the amount that is recommended per day. As they show the amount of energy or an individual nutrient that a group of people of a certain age range (and sometimes gender) needs for good health, they can be used for guidance but shouldn’t be seen as an exact recommendation. You can still look at these values to see if a particular food is high or low in a nutrient that you are interested in.

Here are the RDI's for the average adult diet:
Energy 8700kJ (2081 calories)
Protein  50g
Total fat  70g
Saturated fat  24g
Carbohydrate 310g
Sugar  90g
Sodium  2300mg
In the example here, one serving of this cereal provides 4% of the daily intake for protein, 2% for dietary fibre and 6% for Sodium.

This cereal only contains 1g of fat which is 1% of the RDI for fat (70g daily of which no more than 24g should be from saturated fats). Compare this to the soup, which contains 7.6g, which is already over 10% of the RDI.

Here are some things to visualise when you are looking at a food label:

- Every 5 grams of fat is a teaspoon of fat (or a knob of butter). In the example above, each cup serving of baked beans has 7.6 grams of fat – that’s 1½ teaspoons, or knobs of butter per serving! If you consume the whole can (two servings), then you are consuming three knobs of butter!
THE SKINNY ON FATS

By Susan Bowerman, M.S., R.D., C.S.S.D.

The issue of dietary fat is probably one of the most confusing to people. Should you eat as little as possible? More of the ‘good’ fats?

The answer lies somewhere in between. Ideally, you want to eat only the amount that you need to add flavour to foods, and of the fats you eat, you want to select the healthiest ones. All fats, regardless of their source, are about 120 calories a tablespoon, so most people can’t (and shouldn’t) eat them freely.

Here are some things to remember:

• Fats are categorised as saturated, polyunsaturated or monounsaturated, depending on the predominant fatty acid they contain.

• Polyunsaturated fats can be ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ depending on whether they are primarily Omega-6 fats (which are pro-inflammatory) or Omega-3 fats (which are anti-inflammatory).

• Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids are called ‘essential,’ meaning our bodies can’t make them and must obtain them from dietary sources. On average, people only eat a third of the recommended dietary intake of essential fatty acids – the building blocks of all cells in the human body.

• Our diet is typically overloaded with Omega-6 fatty acids (from cooking oils etc), with inadequate amounts of Omega-3. This imbalance, with too many ‘bad’ fats relative to ‘good’ fats, promotes the inflammatory processes in the body and increases the risk of free radical damage.

• Monounsaturated fats, found in olive oil and avocado, have neutral effects on cholesterol and do not promote cancer. These fats are ‘healthy’ fats and can be eaten in moderation.

• Olive oil is a healthy oil for cooking; if the flavour is too strong for you, you can purchase ‘light’ olive oils which have the same calories as regular olive oil, but are lighter in flavour.
To reduce overall fat intake:

- Try using cooking sprays when you sauté foods, or you can sauté in wine or stock.

- Use low-fat or reduced-fat versions of high-fat items, such as dairy products, spreads and dressings.

- If you are watching calories, keep in mind that low-fat or fat-free versions of baked goods often have the same amount of calories as the full-fat version. In many cases, fat is replaced with sugar which drives up the calories.

- Avoid fatty meats such as steaks, high-fat minced meats, chops and sausages. Eat more poultry breast, fish, shellfish, egg whites, low-fat dairy products and soy products for protein, which have much less fat than red meats.

- Avoid farmed salmon, if possible. Farmed salmon is fattier than wild salmon, but the extra fat it contains is not the ‘good’ fat. Despite myths to the contrary, shellfish is not high in cholesterol, and is an excellent source of protein that is very low in fat.

- Flavour foods with herbs, spices, lemon, onions, garlic, chillies and other seasonings rather than relying on heavy sauces, gravies and butter.

- When you eat out, try to make smart choices. Keep sauces and gravies to a minimum, and order meats, fish or poultry grilled, grilled, poached, steamed, roasted or baked. Some people skip the starchy part of the meal, especially if it’s likely to be fatty, and order double vegetables instead.

- Order salad dressing on the side so you can control how much you eat. Restaurants often drench the greens in high-fat dressings.

- Try fresh fruit or sorbet for dessert rather than pastries and ice cream.
GOOD AND BAD FATS

By Luigi Gratton, M.D., M.P.H.

OMEGA-3s AND OMEGA-6s

Of the many types of fatty acids, two that seem to be making all the headlines these days are the Omega-3s and Omega-6s. These names simply describe the chemical structure of fats, but you only need to remember the Omega-3s tend to reduce inflammation in the body, while the Omega-6s tend to promote inflammation in the body. This is the most basic way to describe these two fatty acids.

The Omega-3s are found in fish, flaxseed and linseed oil, while the Omega-6s are found in corn and wheat. Nutritional anthropologists believe that the diet of ancient women and men was relatively balanced between these two fats. Both are important, and a healthy ratio between the two determines health.

The Omega-3s are also found in ocean plants like seaweed algae. The fish eat the Omega-3-rich algae; the fish store the healthy fats; we eat the fish; and we store the healthy fats. Again, the phrase ‘you are what you eat’ could never be more factual. The Omega-3s are also found in grass, which many animals naturally live on. Cows naturally eat the grass in the fields as they graze, they store the good fats, and we, in turn, get beef that is high in the good fats.

The change in the food supply has dramatically changed this process. Most cows in the United States are now corn-fed to fatten them up faster for food production, a process that is not what nature intended. So once again, we find a disruption of nature’s delicate balance.

Much of the fat we eat is of the bad ‘saturated’ type, and includes hydrogenated oils which have been over-processed leaving them with no nutritional value. Various products, such as margarine, contain damaged polyunsaturates known as ‘trans-fats’. Consuming too much of these bad fats interfere with the body’s uptake of unsaturated fat. It is now recognised that the typical western diet frequently leaves us short of these essential fats which are so important to our well-being. Health professionals therefore now recommend that we consider supplementing our diet with a quality product and benefit from the positive properties of the essential unsaturated fatty acids.

Cutting down on the bad fats will leave your body with less fat to store and reduce the interference bad fats cause to the uptake of good fats. Your body can then make better use of the essential fats that are available.
MEAL SIZE MATTERS

By Luigi Gratton, M.D., M.P.H.

For many of us, one of the main goals of achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is learning how to eat less. Part of the problem is that we don’t have a realistic idea of what constitutes a serving. In an era of jumbo meals, super-sizing and free refills, over generous portions of food and beverages have become the norm. In addition, eating habits that you learned from a young age – that it’s okay to have seconds; that you should clean your plate, that dessert always follows a meal – can be difficult to break. But difficult doesn’t mean impossible. You can train your body to feel full with less, just as it has become accustomed to needing more. Try these suggestions:

• Serve meals already dished onto plates instead of placing serving bowls on the table. This allows you to think twice before having a second portion.

• Try using a smaller plate or festive party bowl to make the food seem like more.

• Eat slowly and savour each bite. When you eat too fast, your brain doesn’t get the signal that you’re full until too late and you’ve already overeaten.

• Eat foods that are healthy and low in calories first. You can eat a lot of these foods without taking in a lot of calories. When at a party, hit the vegetable trays first.

• When eating, focus on your meal and your company. Watching television, reading or working while you eat can distract you. Before you know it, you’ve eaten much more than you wanted to.

• Stop eating as soon as you begin to feel full. Don’t feel as if you need to clean your plate.

• Designate one area of the house to eat meals, such as the kitchen table, and sit to eat your meals.

• If you’re still hungry after you’ve finished what’s on your plate, wait 20 minutes, mingle with other guests, and then if you are still hungry, nibble on something low in calories, such as fresh vegetables or fruit.

• When ordering at a restaurant, request a take-home container. When you receive your meal, put part of it in the container. Or ask that one-half of your meal be put into a container before the meal is served. Portion sizes in restaurants can be two to three times the amount you need.
SECTION FIVE: Week 5: Nutrition Labels; Fats; Portion Control

BE WISE TO PORTION SIZE

ONE SERVING IS EQUIVALENT TO:

One medium-size fruit (size of a tennis ball, your fist or a light bulb). Suggestions:
• Wake up with an orange for breakfast
• Add a sweet crunch to your lunch with an apple
• A pear is a quick and easy dessert

½ cup cooked, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit (smaller than a can of tuna fish). Suggestions:
• Grab some baby carrots for a snack
• Order pizza with mushrooms, onions, capsicums, broccoli or spinach – that’s more than one serving
• Place canned sliced peaches or berries on low-fat ice cream

1 cup of raw leafy vegetables (a handful of greens counts as one serving). Suggestions:
• Add a handful of baby spinach to your sandwich wrap
• Have a mixed green salad with a slice of veggie-topped pizza for lunch
• Keep washed greens in the fridge for a quick salad snack

½ cup cooked dry peas or beans (think smaller than a can of tuna fish again). Suggestions:
• Add canned or frozen beans to vegetable soup
• Make a salad with a variety of lima, red kidney or green beans, diced onions and Italian dressing
• Toss pinto and chick peas into a green salad

QUICK TIP:
When dining out, here’s a new way of looking at those garnishes that make your plates so beautiful: Eat them. Try that orange slice and especially that green parsley. Not only is parsley one of nature’s best remedies to freshen breath, it is naturally nutritious as well.

Source: www.5aday.org
Section Five: Week 5: Nutrition Labels; Fats; Portion Control

Quiz: Portion Distortion

Portion sizes – the amount of food we choose to eat for a meal or snack – have gotten larger over the years, and yet the standard serving sizes that are often referred to are much, much smaller. See how good you are at estimating portions, and also see how much our typical portions have grown over the years.

1. An official serving of cooked meat is 65-100g. A good way to estimate this serving would be to keep in mind that it is about the size of:
   a. A deck of playing cards
   b. A paperback novel
   c. A slice of bread

2. How much larger is a typical serving of pasta, compared to the recommended serving of 1 cup?
   a. One and a half times
   b. Two times
   c. Three times
   d. Four times

3. Twenty years ago, the typical cheeseburger had about 335 calories. How many calories does the typical cheeseburger have today?
   a. 350
   b. 450
   c. 475
   d. 525

4. If you wanted to have a 30g piece of cheese for a snack, that piece of cheese would be about the same size as:
   a. A match box
   b. Your palm
   c. Your thumb
   d. A stick of butter

5. The recommended serving of French fries has about 250 calories. How many calories are in a typical ‘large’ order of French fries?
   a. 400
   b. 450
   c. 500
   d. 550
6. Pizza is no longer just some crust with some sauce and some cheese - it’s loaded with meats and cheeses, and some even have extra cheese in the crust. A recommended serving is a slice of cheese pizza that contains about 250 calories. About how many calories would you find in a slice of a ‘super-loaded’ meat and cheese pizza?

a. 300  
b. 350  
c. 400  
d. 450

7. A small box of buttered popcorn at the movies will contain around 169 calories. How many calories for the maxi tub with butter?

a. 212  
b. 541  
c. 940  
d. over 1000

8. By how much has average portion size increased over the last 30 years?

a. 10%  
b. 15%  
c. 25-50%  
d. 75%

9. A brownie recipe in the 1975 version of the cookbook The Joy of Cooking stated that the recipe made 30 brownies. The exact same recipe in the newest edition of the cookbook states that the recipe makes how many brownies?

a. 1  
b. 8  
c. 16  
d. 24  
e. 30

10. Some tricks that have been shown to work in helping you keep your portion sizes under control are:

a. Using smaller plates  
b. Drinking out of glasses that are tall and skinny, rather than short and wide  
c. Eating with a teaspoon instead of a soup spoon  
d. Eating foods that are all the same colour  
e. All of the above