

Are You Label Literate?

For several years now, pre-packaged foods have donned the black and white print known as the nutrition fact label. The expectation was that it would help consumers make healthier choices if all the numbers you needed were printed on the package. However, for many, food labels are not as easy to decipher as one might think.

What to Know When It Comes to Reading Labels:

① SERVING INFORMATION

This is usually found right at the top of the Nutrition Fact label and is the **KEY** to understanding the rest of the numbers. There are two parts to the serving information: the serving size and the number of servings.

The serving size tells you the amount of food that relates to the numbers on the food label (Eg. Serving ½ cup, Calories: 120). This would mean there are 120 calories in ½ cup of the contents in the package. Make sure you notice if it says raw or prepared.

The number of servings tells you how many servings the entire package contains.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110

A serving size might be something simple like ½ cup or 7 pieces. But often the serving size can be misleading:

- A** Let's say a 'snack pack' of low-fat, sodium reduced crackers indicates that 5 crackers is a serving and has 60 calories. Now say there are 20 crackers in that convenient 'little' pack. Harmless enough, right? Eating the whole package means you had 4 servings at 240 calories and more fat and sodium than you bargained for.

OR

- B** The suggested serving may be listed in a way to make the product look like it is low in calories or fat, but in fact could be misleading. Example, a can of nuts claims '150 calories!' But turning the can over reveals 150 calories per serving identified as 1 oz or 28g. This amount can look very different depending on the food item at hand.

NUT SERVING GUIDE

See the following chart to understand just how 1 oz (28g) looks from nut to nut!

NUT	1 OZ.(28g)	CALORIES	PROTEIN
Almonds	20-24 pcs	160	6g
Brazil nuts	6-8 pcs	190	4g
Cashews	16-18 pcs	160	4g
Hazelnuts	18-20 pcs	180	4g
Macadamias	10-12 pcs	200	2g
Peanuts	28 pcs	170	7g
Pecans	18-20 Halves	200	3g
Pine nuts	150-157 pcs	160	7g
Pistachios	45-47 pcs	160	6g
Walnuts	14 Halves	190	4g

Source: Adapted from the International Tree Nut Council Research and Education Foundation publications, Nutrients in 1 Ounce of Tree Nuts and Peanuts, January 2003 <www.nuthealth.org/nutrition/nutrient1oz.html> and Nutrition in Every Handful, August 2002, <www.nuthealth.org/inside.pdf>.

To add to the nuttiness, advertising agencies often describe 1 oz of nuts as a handful. A handful of Brazil nuts would have you eating about 600 calories, which is far too many when weight loss is the goal!

SLIMBAND RECOMMENDS:

Have 10 nuts at a time, paired with ½ cup of fruit as an ideal snack. It provides physical satisfaction and you receive the healthy benefits of the almond or peanut, but don't overdo the calories.



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② CARBOHYDRATES

The one 'serving' of bread we so often hear about in the Food Guide is defined as weighing 28 grams or 1 oz, and contains 15 grams of carbohydrates.

However, one pita slice or one bagel does not a serving make. Have a look:

Bagels

1 serving ranges from 30 grams (Lender's frozen®, plain) to 60 grams (What A Bagel®, cinnamon swirl)

English muffins

1 serving can be as low as 24 grams (Thomas'®, honey wheat) or as high as 56 grams (Wolferman's®, cinnamon and raisin)

Pita bread

1 serving ranges from 15 grams (Jude's®, wheat or white) to 42 grams (Athens® onion, wheat or white) per serving

Tortillas

1 serving can have 10 grams (LaTortilla®, whole wheat) or 30 grams (Whole Foods® traditional)

Telling yourself, "it's just one pita" doesn't cut it if you want to be realistic about what is going in. This little tidbit about carbohydrates is a gem so share with others: **Most people don't know one bagel equals four slices of bread!** And now you can spread the word that the large bowl of pasta served at a restaurant boasts the equivalent of 7 slices of bread or more!

Does it mean you can never eat these foods again?

Certainly not. But you can start looking at foods in the carbohydrate group with fresh eyes and re-assess your portion sizes. You may surprise yourself, and it can help you bust out of a frustrating weight plateau.

③ CONSUMER BEWARE...

Organic: Cookies and chocolate bars made without the use of chemical pesticides or genetically modified organisms still have simple sugars and fat and should be used sparingly when aiming to shed extra pounds.

Cholesterol free: Cholesterol is made in the liver. If the food product didn't come from an animal, it never had cholesterol to begin with. A potato, for example, has no liver. Thus, potato chips

have always been cholesterol free. But, most potato chips still have a high fat and salt content. Foods with slogans of 'cholesterol free' might still be filled with fat and sugar, but the health claim makes you think, 'go ahead and indulge.' What may not be known is: it is not the cholesterol from food that raises the cholesterol levels in your blood, it is saturated fat. (Fat from animal sources)

Sodium Reduced: As sodium chloride (table salt) has been recognized as a major factor contributing to events of stroke and heart disease, food companies are aiming to find ways to put less in their goods without sacrificing taste. Currently, daily recommendations of salt intake for the general population are 2300 mg. However, this is currently under review with the consideration of lowering that to 1500 mg per day. One teaspoon of salt contains approximately 2000 mg of sodium, so try to avoid adding extra salt to your meals. A frozen dinner entrée might tout being 30 per cent lower in sodium than previous generations, compared to other brands etc, but if it still has 800 mg per serving that is pretty hefty. Check if the sodium per serving is the whole entrée or half. Did you consume other high salt foods today as well?

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 1.5g	
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

BONUS TIP

The Nutrition Fact Label often shows total carbs and sub-categories of the sources they came from. Be keenly aware of how much of the total carbohydrate is made up of simple sugars or fibre.



SHAKE THE HABIT!