

# Nutrition News for Seniors



Provided by the Nutrition Division of the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services

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## Decoding the Nutrition Facts Label

People look at food labels for different reasons. But whatever the reason, here is how consumers can easily and effectively use this information.

### The Nutrition Facts Label - An Overview

The information in the main or top section (see #1-4 and #6 on the sample nutrition label below), can vary with each food product; it contains product-specific information (serving size, calories, and nutrient information). The bottom part (see #5 on the sample label below) contains a footnote with Daily Values (DVs) for 2,000 and 2,500 calorie diets. This footnote provides recommended dietary information for important nutrients, including fats, sodium and fiber. The footnote is found only on larger packages and does not change from product to product.

Sample label for  
Macaroni & Cheese

**1 Start Here** —

**2 Check Calories**

**3 Limit these Nutrients**

**4 Get Enough of these Nutrients**

**5 Footnote**

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b> 250	Calories from Fat 110
	<b>% Daily Value*</b>
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	10%
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	20%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
<b>Protein</b> 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

**6**

**Quick Guide to % DV**

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- 5% or less is Low
- 20% or more is High

## 1 The Serving Size

The place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts label is the serving size and the number of servings in the package. Serving sizes are standardized to make it easier to compare similar foods; they are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., the number of grams.

The size of the serving determines the number of calories and all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. **Pay attention to the serving size, especially how many servings the package contains. Then ask yourself, "How many servings am I eating"?** (e.g., 1/2 serving, 1 serving, or more)

## 2 Calories (and Calories from Fat)

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. Many Americans consume more calories than they need but still do not get the recommended daily amount of each nutrient. The calorie section of the label can help you manage your weight (i.e., gain, lose, or maintain.) **Remember: the number of servings you consume determines how many of calories you actually eat (your portion size).**

## 3 4 The Nutrients: How Much?

Look at the top of the nutrient section in the sample label. It shows you some key nutrients that impact on your health and separates them into two main groups. The nutrients listed first are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much. They are identified in yellow as **Limit these Nutrients**. Eating too much fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, or sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, like heart disease, some cancers or high blood pressure.

Most Americans don't eat enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. They are identified in blue as **Get Enough of these Nutrients**. Consuming enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions.

**Remember: You can use the Nutrition Facts label not only to help limit those nutrients you want to cut back on, but also to increase those nutrients you need to consume in greater amounts.**

## 5 Understanding the Footnote on the Bottom of the Label

Note the \* after the heading "% Daily Value" on the Nutrition Facts label. It refers to the Footnote in the lower part of the nutrition label, which tells you "%DVs are based on a 2,000 calorie diet." This statement must be on all food labels. DVs are recommended levels of intakes. DVs in the footnote are based on a 2,000 or 2,500 calorie diet. Note how the recommended DVs for some nutrients change, while others (cholesterol and sodium) remain the same for both calorie amounts.

## 6 The Percent Daily Values (%DV):

The % Daily Values (%DVs) listed on the right side of the label are based on the Daily Value recommendations for key nutrients that are part of a 2,000 calorie diet. You, like most people, may not know how many calories you consume in a day. But you can still use the %DV as a frame of reference. The %DV helps you determine if a serving of food is high in a nutrient (20%) or low (5%).

When shopping for groceries, aim to choose products with 5%DV or less for all nutrients you want to limit (e.g., fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium). For those nutrients you want to consume in greater amounts (fiber, calcium, etc), look for products listing 20%DV or more which is considered high.