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# SP719-A Quick Bites Let the Food Label Be Your Guide Through the Grocery Store Jungle

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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# Quick Bites

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## Let the Food Label Be Your Guide Through the Grocery Store Jungle

It's easy to get lost in the vast "jungle" of foods at your local grocery store. While shopping for food, you may be bombarded with thousands of food marketing tactics that are geared to get you to spend more money on food.

Food companies design their packages with bright photos or colorful characters to catch your eye and lure your interest away from similar products that may cost less. Along with the dazzling packages, many foods list health claims, like the food is "sugar-free" or "low-fat," to grab your attention and get you to spend a little more money on their product. But, the pretty boxes and promises of health do not always mean the food is the best choice for your family.



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The "Nutrition Facts" label can be your road map through the grocery store jungle. The food label is a great tool that gives you the information you need to make better food choices – both for your budget and your health.

### Tips for Using Food Labels

Though the Nutrition Facts label provides a lot of helpful information, it could be difficult to focus that information to best meet your needs. These tips can help you get started using food labels to easily compare the foods you buy:

- Begin by comparing the labels on different brands of one food you normally buy, such as a cereal or canned soup.
- Focus on one thing at a time. If you want to eat less fat, compare total fat, saturated fat and trans fat. If you want to eat less salt, compare sodium. You can then select the brand with the least fat or sodium.
- Compare how much you really eat to the serving size shown on the label. If you eat more, multiply the numbers on the label by the number of servings you will actually eat.



# Reading & Using the Nutrition Facts Label

1. Start Here - Everything on this label is specific to this serving size.

3. Limit These Nutrients

4. Eat Enough of These Nutrients

5. Footnote - This portion of the label shows the daily goal of several nutrients based on a 2,000 or 2,500 calorie diet.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
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>Potassium</b> 700mg	20%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
<b>Protein</b> 5g	
<b>Vitamin A</b>	4%
<b>Vitamin C</b>	2%
<b>Calcium</b>	20%
<b>Iron</b>	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

2. Check the Calories - This tells you how many calories you will be consuming if you eat the serving size. "Calories from Fat" shows you how much of the calorie content comes from fat.

6. Daily Values Made Easy - If the % Daily Value of a nutrient is less than 5%, the food is low in that nutrient. If the % Daily Value is 20% or greater, the food is high in that nutrient. Nutrients with no % Daily Value listed do not have a set recommendation for the amount to eat in one day.

**Reading Food Labels - The Bottom Line:** Food Labels and Nutrition Facts enable you to compare products based on key ingredients. When comparing products, focus on those nutrients that are important to you.

- If you are concerned about your weight you should compare products based on BOTH calories and fat.
- If you have heart disease or high blood pressure you should focus on the amount of total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium. Choose products containing less than 20% Daily Values for fat, cholesterol and sodium.
- If you have diabetes, you should pay attention to the amount of total carbohydrate, sugar and dietary fiber.

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