

UNDERSTANDING FOOD LABELS: A QUICK GUIDE

Knowing what is in your food is important to help make informed decisions about what to buy when grocery shopping. Health Canada requires most packaged food products have labels with information about what and how much nutrients are in food products. This lets you compare and choose between different food products.

Food labels provide nutrition information and must include:

- Nutrition facts table
- Ingredients list

Some food products may also have:

- Nutrition claims
- Front-of-package nutrition symbol

HOW TO READ A FOOD LABEL

STEP 1: START WITH THE SERVING SIZE

The **serving size** is listed at the top of the nutrition facts table, under the header “**Nutrition Facts.**” Information on nutrient amounts and calories is based on the serving size. You need to compare the serving size listed on the table to the amount you actually eat to determine how much a food product contributes to your nutrient intake.

The serving size is listed in common household measurements (e.g., cups, number of pieces), followed by the metric measurement. For example, in grams (g) or milliliters (mL).

This sample nutrition facts table of a bread product is for two slices (80 g):

- If you only eat one slice, halve all the numbers listed in the table
- If you eat four slices, double all the numbers listed in the table

STEP 2: CHECK OUT THE % DAILY VALUE

The **% Daily Value** is on the right side of the nutrition facts table. Use it as a guide to compare one food product to another, or to understand if the food product has a little or a lot of a nutrient:

Nutrition Facts Valeur nutritive	
Per 2 slices (80 g) pour 2 tranches (80 g)	
Calories 170	% Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 2 g	3 %
Saturated / saturés 0.4 g + Trans / trans 0.5 g	5 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 33 g	
Fibre / Fibres 4 g	14 %
Sugars / Sucres 3 g	3 %
Protein / Protéines 6 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	
Sodium 360 mg	16 %
Potassium 100 mg	3 %
Calcium 50 mg	4 %
Iron / Fer 1.75 mg	10 %

*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot
*5 % ou moins c'est peu, 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup

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- 5% Daily Value or less means a little
- 15% Daily Value or more means a lot

This can help you choose food products with nutrients you may want to increase or limit. For example, you may want more fibre or calcium and less saturated fats, sodium, or sugars.

You can compare the **% Daily Value** and nutrients of two food products with similar serving sizes. In this example, both food products have the same serving size (55 grams). Compared to the product on the left, the product on the right has less sodium and more calcium.

Nutrition Facts Valeur nutritive		Nutrition Facts Valeur nutritive	
Per 1/2 can (55 g) pour 1/2 boîte de conserve (55 g)		Per 1/2 can (55 g) pour 1/2 boîte de conserve (55 g)	
Calories 90	% Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*	Calories 110	% Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 4.5 g	6 %	Fat / Lipides 8 g	11 %
Saturated / saturés 1 g	5 %	Saturated / saturés 1.5 g	8 %
+ Trans / trans 0 g		+ Trans / trans 0 g	
Carbohydrate / Glucides 0 g		Carbohydrate / Glucides 0 g	
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	0 %	Fibre / Fibres 0 g	0 %
Sugars / Sucres 0 g	0 %	Sugars / Sucres 0 g	0 %
Protein / Protéines 12 g		Protein / Protéines 10 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 25 mg		Cholesterol / Cholestérol 25 mg	
Sodium 270 mg	12 %	Sodium 45 mg	2 %
Potassium 175 mg	5 %	Potassium 200 mg	6 %
Calcium 0 mg	0 %	Calcium 100 mg	8 %
Iron / Fer 0.4 mg	2 %	Iron / Fer 0.5 mg	3 %
*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot *5 % ou moins c'est peu, 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup		*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot *5 % ou moins c'est peu, 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup	

Health Canada now has standard reference servings sizes to help make it easier to compare food products. If the serving size is not the same, it will be more difficult to compare food products.

STEP 3: LOOK AT THE INGREDIENTS LIST

All the ingredients in the food product are listed in order by weight. This means there is more of the ingredients at the beginning of the list compared to the ingredients at the end of the list.

All added sugars grouped together in brackets as **“Sugars.”** This makes it easier to identify all sources of sugars-based ingredients added to the food product.

Ingredients: Sugars (fancy molasses, brown sugar, sugar) • Flour • Vegetable oil shortening • Liquid whole egg • Salt • Sodium bicarbonate • Spices • Allura red.
Contains: Wheat • Egg.

You can also find important information about food allergens here. Common food allergens must be listed. These include eggs, milk, peanuts, seafood, sesame seeds, soy, tree nuts, wheat, mustard, and added sulphites. Gluten sources must also be labelled.

There are two ways allergens can be listed: within the ingredients list or after the ingredients list in a “Contains” statement.

Allergens (wheat, eggs and milk) listed within the **ingredients list**:

Ingredients: Apples • Pie crust [flour (wheat), shortening, liquid albumen (egg), salt] • Sugar • Flour • Lemon juice • Whole milk • Cinnamon.

Allergens (wheat, eggs and milk) listed using a **“Contains”** statement:

Ingredients: Apples • Pie crust [flour, shortening, liquid albumen, salt] • Sugar • Flour • Lemon juice • Whole milk • Cinnamon.
Contains: Wheat • Egg • Milk.

You may also see allergens listed in a **“May contain”** statement. This is an optional statement that indicates the possible presence of an allergen in the food product due to cross-contamination.

Ingredients: Apples • Pie crust [flour (wheat), shortening, liquid albumen (egg), salt] • Sugar • Flour • Lemon juice • Whole milk • Cinnamon.
Contains: Wheat • Egg • Milk
May contain pecans.

NUTRIENT CONTENT AND HEALTH CLAIMS

Nutrition claims are optional statements on food labels that highlight specific nutrients, foods, or ingredients. It is important to check the nutrition facts table and list of ingredients when making food choices, even if there are claims on the package.

Foods must meet certain criteria to ensure that nutrition claims are consistent and accurate, for example:

- Good source of fibre, excellent source of calcium
- Low fat, reduced sodium
- Oat fibre helps lower cholesterol
- A healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats may reduce the risk of heart disease

Other types of claims may also appear on labels. These claims can be misleading and do not always provide useful information. Do not rely on these types of claims when choosing your food. These include:

- Symbols and logos that are not from Health Canada
- Vague claims that an ingredient or food provides a health benefit
- Broad, simple claims about the nutritional value of a food, such as: "smart, healthy or sensible"

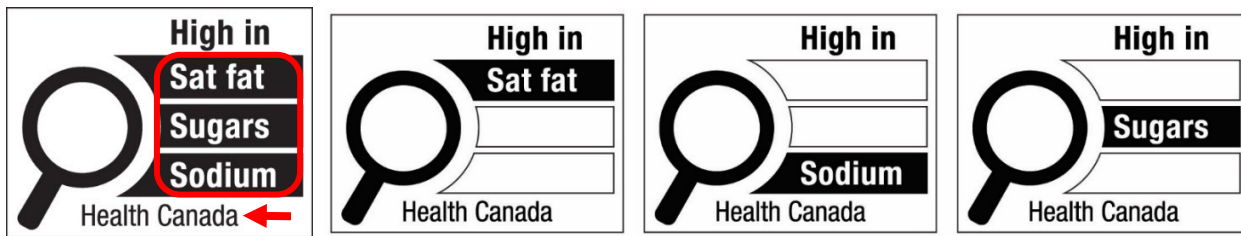
FRONT-OF-PACKAGE NUTRITION SYMBOLS

By the end of 2025, there will be a symbol on the front of the prepackaged foods to help identify which ones are high in saturated fats, sugars, and/or sodium.

Food products that do not need to have this symbol include:

- Fresh, whole foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, some plain dairy products).
- Foods in very small or individually portioned packages that are meant to be served along with meals or snacks (e.g., soup crackers, coffee creamers).

The black and white symbol, on the upper half of a product label, will highlight what nutrient the food product is high in. If the food product is not high in one of these nutrients, it will be left blank.



Supplemented Foods

Supplemented foods are prepackaged foods with one or more specific ingredients (supplemental ingredients) added for purposes other than nutrition. This can include bars with added vitamins and minerals or caffeinated energy drinks. Supplemented food products that may pose a health risk will have this label at the front of package.



Supplemented foods will also have a Supplemented Food Facts table, not a Nutrition Facts table. These products are required to state which items they have been supplemented with.

Cautionary statements are required if the food product contains certain supplemental ingredients (e.g., caffeine), or high amounts of a supplemental ingredient. These ingredients may pose a health risk if you eat or drink too much of the food product, or for specific populations like children or pregnant individuals. Examples of cautionary statements include “Do not drink more than one serving per day.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about food labelling in Canada, visit Health Canada: healthcanada.gc.ca

- [Food labels](#)
- [Nutrient content claims: what they mean](#)
- [Supplemented foods](#)

For more information about healthy eating, visit york.ca/nutrition or unlockfood.ca.

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, access Health811 by calling 8-1-1, or visit ontario.ca/health811 for the live chat feature.

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