



Read Any Great Labels Lately?

Learner Outcomes

After completion of the lesson, students will be able to:

- discuss the reasons for nutrition labeling of food
- identify types of nutrition information on the new food label
- make simple comparisons among food products using the food label

Materials

- variety of food packages with new labeling. For the “think tank” at the end of the lesson, include orange juice and other vitamin C-rich foods; milk, cheese, reduced-fat cheese, and other calcium-rich foods; iron-rich foods, such as fortified breakfast cereals and meat; and french fries and low-fat snacks .
- paper grocery sack
- “What’s New About the New Food Label?” poster
- “What’s Inside the Package?” activity sheet (page 10), one copy per student

Label Facts

You're shopping for lunch ... and you're bombarded with choices. Which package of hot dogs has the least amount of fat? What's the difference between skim and whole milk? And which fruit has more vitamin C—canned applesauce or peaches? You'll find answers on the food label.

Why Labeling .?

New food labels tell a lot about food. They don't suggest what foods to eat—that's your decision. But labels can help you make your "personal best" food choices—choices that benefit you now and in the future, too.

Looking good, feeling great! Teenagers' health goals should include a healthful diet. The teen years demand more nutrients and often more calories than any other time of life. That's because teenagers are still growing. But their "on-the-run" lifestyles often prevent them from getting the right amount of nutrients and calories they need.

In the short run, food choices make a difference. For example, a diet that's low in iron—typical among teenage girls—may result in anemia, which causes paleness and a tired feeling. A teenage athlete who cuts back on calories to trim down may not have enough energy for peak performance. And eating more calories than you use often shows up as extra pounds of body fat.

Down the road—in 20 or 30 years—the results of a poor diet may start to show up in other ways. If you eat a diet with too much fat and not enough fiber over a long period, you may be more likely to develop heart disease, obesity or cancer. And girls who don't eat enough calcium-rich foods, such as milk, cheese and yogurt, are more prone to osteoporosis later in life. Osteoporosis can cause a humpback-like appearance and brittle bones that break easily.

What makes a healthful diet for teenagers? The Dietary Guidelines for Americans say:

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Maintain healthy weight.
- Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.

- Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits and grain products.
- Use sugars only in moderation.
- Use salt and sodium only in moderation.
- For teens, avoid alcoholic beverages.

The good news is: Nutrition labeling can help you make food choices that meet these Dietary Guidelines and promote a lifetime of good health. With today's labels, you can:

- compare one food with another
- choose foods that help provide the balance of nutrients your body needs
- plan meals and your whole diet so they are moderate, varied and balanced.

Today's Food Labels

Almost all foods carry nutrition labels these days. In 1994, Nutrition Facts became mandatory for most packaged foods. Fresh fruits and vegetables and raw meat, poultry and seafood can be labeled voluntarily; for these raw foods, nutrition information may be printed on the package or on pamphlets or posters displayed near the food.

Like the can of macaroni and cheese you see here, today's updated food labels carry all kinds of nutrition information.

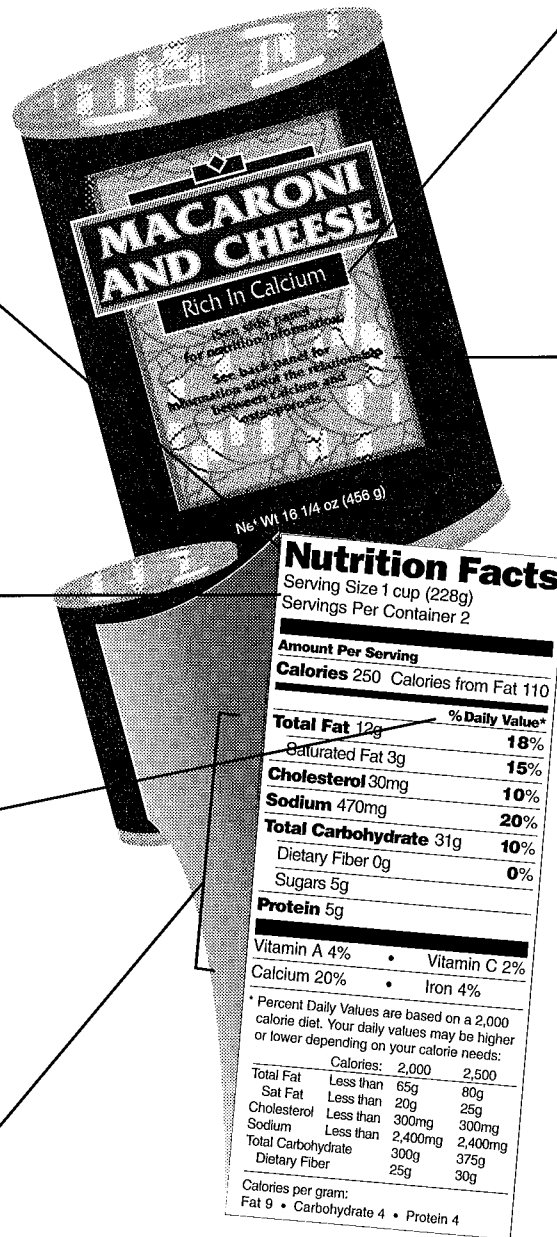
- For quick comparisons, look for the nutrient content claims, such as "rich in calcium," "low calorie," "fat free," or "high fiber," which may appear on the front. With a few brief words, they alert you to foods that have more of one dietary component (that is, calories, nutrients and fiber) or less of another. If you want foods with fewer calories or less fat, sodium or cholesterol—or more fiber, calcium, iron, or vitamin C—check nutrient content claims. Because they're strictly defined by the government, claims can only be used if a food meets the specific definition.

- More nutrition information is printed on the side or back of the package. Compared with the claims on the front, Nutrition Facts specifically tell the amount of calories and nutrients in a single serving of a food. That includes two nutrients—calcium and iron—which are low in many teenage diets.

The panel starts with a serving size. It's an important reference since calorie and nutrient amounts are based on this amount.

Nutrient amounts are listed in two ways: in metric amounts (grams or milligrams) and by %Daily Values. Either way, use them to compare the similarities and differences among foods.

Some dietary components are required on the label: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrate, fiber, sugars, protein, vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron. Knowing about them can help you choose a healthful diet.



- On some labels, you'll find health claims, too. These claims describe the health benefits that a food or nutrient may provide. For example, eating enough calcium helps keep your bones healthy—bones need calcium to grow longer and stronger during teen years. Eating more fruits and vegetables may reduce the chance of developing some forms of cancer. Health claims, which appear on new labels, are based on sound science. No matter what your age, food choices you make now may help you avoid some health problems now and later on—and may help you live a longer, more active life.

- An ingredient list appears on foods with two or more ingredients. Macaroni and cheese, pizza, and ice cream, for example, all have an ingredient list. So do most processed foods. Ingredients must be listed in descending order, by weight, with the most given first. This list gives you another way to compare foods.

Learning Strategies

Complete Steps 1-3. Step 4 is optional. If Step 4 is completed, consult the "Teacher Tips" on the electronic curriculum--it contains information on modifying the lesson so that it is developmentally appropriate.

1. **Survey the Label.** Fill a grocery bag with a variety of food packages, all bearing the new food label. Have each student reach into the bag and remove one package.

Introduce the lesson by having students study the packages, then name five things a label might tell them about the food inside. On the board, list the types of information they find.

2. **Brainstorm the Reasons for Food Labeling.** Talk briefly about how food choices affect health now—and in the future. Survey the class: How might food labels help you make food choices for a healthful diet? Explain that food labels help them:
 - compare foods
 - make informed food choices that match their own personal needs
 - plan meals and their whole diet to meet dietary guidelines

3. **Locate Parts of a Food Label.** Using the poster "What's New About the New Food Label?" and their food packages, have students find and discuss nutrition information on the new label.

First, have them find the Nutrition Facts panel. Point out that the heading Nutrition Facts identifies the new label. Talk about the parts of this panel: serving sizes; calories, nutrients and fiber; and %Daily Values. Point out that they can use the calories and the %Daily Value per serving to quickly compare foods ... and see how one serving fits in a 2,000-calorie diet.

Second, have students look for nutrient content claims, such as "cholesterol free" or "low calorie," on their labels. Explain that these claims are a quick reference, but the Nutrition Facts give more specific

information. Point out that these claims won't appear on all labels.

Third, have students find any health claims on the food labels. Explain that these claims describe how a food or a component of food relates to health conditions, such as heart disease, cancer or osteoporosis, but they need to check the Nutrition Facts for specific information. Again, health claims won't appear on all labels.

Fourth, have students find the ingredient list. Point out that almost all foods have this list, unless the product has just one ingredient.

Point out: The nutrition information on a food label doesn't suggest that any food is "good" or "bad." Any food can fit in a healthful diet. Using the food label helps them make smart food choices for a varied, balanced and moderate diet.

Ask: What else can you learn about the food by reading the label? Students might say: total quantity or weight, cooking or storage instructions, recipes, manufacturer's name and address, product freshness date.

4. **Create a Food Label "Data Bank."** Distribute the activity sheet "What's Inside the Package?" Explain that the sheet has two blank labels.

Have students collect a variety of food labels that were reviewed in class. Have them record the name of their packaged food, specific Nutrition Facts, any nutrient content claims and health claims, and the ingredient list on one blank label.

As a homework assignment, have them find a similar product at home or at the grocery store. Ask them

to record the nutrition information from its package on the other blank label on the activity sheet; then compare the two foods. As examples, students might compare ice cream and frozen yogurt, or fruit packed in syrup and in juice, or cheese and sausage pizza. Note: Students might add to this food label "data bank" throughout their lessons on labeling, for use with lesson 5.

5. **Conduct a "Think Tank."** To give students practice using the label and making simple comparisons, conduct a "think tank." Pose the following situations; have students make informed choices using their food packages.

- You missed your glass of orange juice at breakfast. To get the vitamin C you need, what might you snack on instead?
- As a teenager, you need enough calcium to grow strong, healthy bones. What foods could you eat today that would add up to at least 100% of the Daily Value for calcium?
- You know that getting enough iron in your diet isn't always easy. Which of these foods have the most iron?
- You enjoy cheese on a burger. How does the fat content compare between traditional and reduced-fat cheese?
- Orange juice and milk have different nutrients. How do they compare? Why can't you substitute one for the other?

As a lesson extension, have students pose their own "think tank" situations to the class.

To Learn More ...

1. **Vending Machine Messages.** Have students create point-of-purchase nutrition information to post on the outside of the school's vending machine. Have them gather their information from labels on snacks sold in that vending machine.
2. **Rate Your Snack Attack.** Create a bulletin board corner of snack labels. Have students bring in labels from snack foods, such as pizza, frozen burritos, granola bars, and pretzels, to hang on the board. Discuss their nutritional contributions and how these foods fit in a balanced, moderate and varied diet.
3. **Media Corner.** The new labels are making the news today! Have students bring in clippings that focus on labels from newspapers, magazines and other media. Post them on the board.

