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What Is The Nutrition Facts Label?

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Introduction

The Nutrition Facts label, NFL, states valuable nutritional information of a food product and is found on the back or side of the package. These panels are designed to help people understand what nutrients are in the foods that they eat. Since 1990 the NFL has been an informative tool, required by law, to help consumers compare foods and make healthier choices [1, 2].

How does the Nutrition Facts Label Work?

The first part of the NFL (1) states the number of servings in the package and the serving size. Serving size [2] is written in large font on the nutrition fact panel so the consumer knows what is considered a serving of the food. Serving size is based on the amount of food that is customarily eaten at one time and is not a recommendation of how much to eat. The nutrition information listed on the Nutrition Facts label is usually based on one serving of the food; however, some containers may also have information displayed per package.

The second section of the NFL (2) lists the number of calories per serving. Many people mistakenly only focus on this section, but all sections provide valuable information [2]. It is important to first look at the serving size because

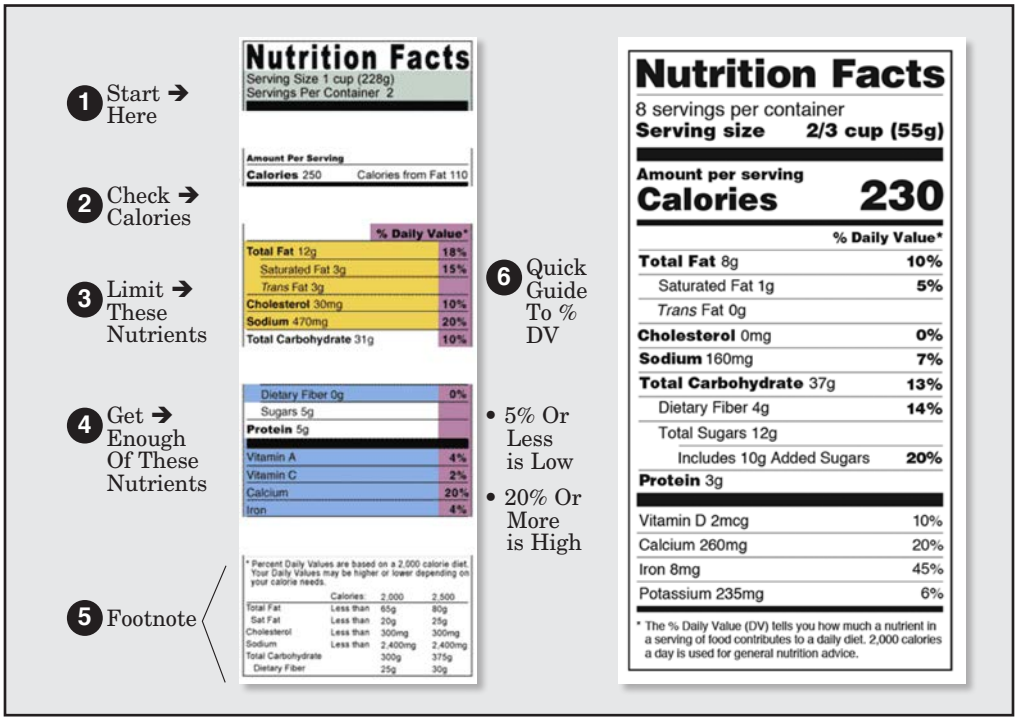

Figure 1 represents the updated NFL which is replacing the older format found on food packaging. (3).

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the calorie number is the amount of calories or energy in the portion size listed [3]. As a general guide, 100 calories per serving of an individual food is considered a moderate amount, and 400 calories or more per serving of an individual food is considered high in calories.

The next section of the NFL 3 lists the nutrients that Americans get too much of, should try to eat less and nutrients that we need to eat more. Eating too much saturated fat, trans fat, sugars and sodium can be harmful for the body and can contribute to the development of certain diseases [3]. For example, high levels of trans fat and saturated fat intake are linked to heart disease. Americans also eat too much salt (sodium is found in salt), which can lead to high blood pressure.

Many Americans do not get the recommended amount of dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium. These nutrients and diets that encourage consuming more of these nutrients can reduce the risk of developing some health conditions such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and anemia. Use the label to choose products that are lower in nutrients you need less of and higher in nutrients you need more of.

What is the DV%?

The Daily Values are reference amounts of nutrients to consume or not to exceed each day (for adults and children 4 year of age and older) and are used to calculate the Percent Daily Value. It is referenced in the last section of the NFL 5.

Percent Daily Value, DV, shows how much a nutrient in a serving of the food contributes to a total daily diet. Two thousand calories a day is used for general nutrition advice. DV needs can change depending on age, physical activity level and gender [4, 5]. If your calorie needs are lower or higher, DV will vary accordingly.

Use the DV to determine if a serving of the food is high or low in an individual nutrient and to compare food products. Be sure to check that the serving sizes are the same. As a general guide, 5 percent DV or less of a nutrient per serving is considered low, and 20 percent DV or more of a nutrient per serving is considered high.

Why Read the Nutrition Facts Label?

Diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart diseases and obesity are public health concerns in the United States, especially in Arkansas [2]. Diet is closely linked to these diseases. For example, obesity is an imbalance between the calories we eat and the calories we burn each day. Obesity is linked to a poor diet, weight gain and environmental factors which increase an individual's risk for type 2 diabetes, heart and kidney disease [7, 8]. Heart disease can be avoided by following a diet low in saturated fat, trans fat and salt.

Who Reads the Nutrition Facts Label?

Studies have shown that only one-third of the adult population uses the information found on the NFL. The panel is used most frequently by white and Hispanic women without children who have a high education level and are engaging in weight-loss activities. For example women who are trying to lose weight are 67 percent more likely to use the NFL [1].

The impact of the Nutrition Facts Label on health research shows NFL users eat more vegetables than non-users (around half a cup more) and also eat less calories, less added sugar and less fast food [1]. The NFL appears to positively impact consumers' health and dietary choices.

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