

The Basics

Consumers can gain useful information by reading labels on the foods they purchase.

Under regulations from the Food and Drug Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the label offers useful ingredient and nutrition information.

All food labels bear the name of the food product, net contents, and name and address of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor. Other components of the label vary.

The net contents represents the net weight including liquid, as in canned corn, or the liquid measure for a fluid product, such as tomato juice. Net contents is listed in common household (pounds/ounces) and metric measures.

Ingredients

A food label must include a list of ingredients in descending order by weight. Any food colorings used must be listed separately. Flavorings do not need to be listed individually but may be included as “flavorings” or “natural flavors.” However, due to sensitivities of some individuals to protein hydrolysates used as flavor enhancers, those ingredients must be listed separately. Sources of protein also must be designated. For example, soy, corn, or casein must be listed as “hydrolyzed soy protein,” “hydrolyzed corn protein” or “hydrolyzed casein.” Milk also must be designated as the source

What’s on a Food Label?

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of casein to alert people who may be allergic to milk protein or who may avoid milk for religious purposes.

Sulfiting agents must be included in the ingredient list to protect individuals who react adversely to sulfites. Beverages that claim juice as an ingredient must list the percentage of juice in the formulation. Manufacturers also must state that the beverage is flavored by the named juice, such as “cranberry-flavored juice drink” or declare the amount of the named juice in a range within five percent, as “juice blend, 3 to 8 percent strawberry juice.”

Potassium	3,500 mg	3,500 mg
Total Carbohydrate	300 g	375 g
Dietary Fiber	25 g	30 g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4		
Ingredients: Milled corn, sugar, corn syrup, molasses, salt, partially hydrogenated cottonseed and/or soybean oil ^{***} , sodium ascorbate and ascorbic acid (vitamin C), niacinamide, zinc oxide, reduced iron, pyridoxine hydrochloride (vitamin B ₆), thiamin hydrochloride (vitamin B ₁), riboflavin (vitamin B ₂), vitamin A palmitate, annatto color, BHT (preservative), folic acid, vitamin B ₁₂ and vitamin D.		
^{***} Adds a negligible amount of fat.		
Corn used in the product contains traces of soybeans.		

Open Dating

Open dating is product dating that is clearly identifiable by consumers, thus, it is “open” for all to see. The date allows consumers to know the date beyond which the **quality** of the product may fall below normal level. One type of open date is the “sell by” date, which represents the last day the product should be sold or used by the retailer. It is frequently seen on items such as meat or dairy products.

The “expiration date” or “use by” date is the last day the product should be eaten. Examples of items with this type of date are

baby foods.

A “freshness” date may be used on items with a short shelf life, such as bakery products. Products may also contain a “pack date,” the day the product was packaged.



Code dating

Code dating is used for products, such as canned or packaged foods that have a long shelf life. Code dating is particularly useful if a food recall occurs. The dating contained in a code is not discernible by consumers. It is intended for the manufacturer’s use and provides information such as the

date and place of packing. This dating is required for low-acid, canned foods.



Universal Product Code (UPC)

Virtually all products today carry UPC bar codes. The UPC is specific for each product. Computer scanners can easily interpret the code and facilitate inventory control and product pricing. It provides a great deal of data to suppliers and retailers.



Religious symbols

Two symbols used on foods are important for people of the Jewish faith: “K” within a circle means the food complies with Jewish dietary laws and was processed under the supervision of a rabbi. It is “Kosher.” A “U” inside a circle means it complies with Jewish dietary laws and is authorized by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, known as the Orthodox Union. The word “Parev” next to these symbols

means the food contains neither meat nor dairy ingredients.

Legal symbols

The ® and © symbols appear on some products. The ® means the trademark of the product is registered with the U.S. Patent Office. The © means the text and art content of the label is protected under U.S. copyright laws and that copies of such labels have been filed with the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress.

Meat Safety Label

Raw or partially cooked meat and poultry products display “Safe Handling Instructions” outlining food safety tips for temperature control, keeping raw and cooked food separate, cleaning surfaces and hands, cooking and holding hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

Safe Handling Instructions

This product was inspected for your safety. Some animal products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.

	Keep refrigerated or frozen. Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.
	Keep raw (meats or poultry) separate from other foods. Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils, and hands after touching raw (meat or poultry).
	Cook thoroughly.
	Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Inspection and Grading Symbols

Round inspection stamps on meat, poultry, and packaged meats mean that the food is wholesome and was slaughtered, packed or processed under sanitary conditions. Food grades on some types of meat, poultry, eggs, dairy foods, and produce are shield-shaped and reflect quality grades or evaluations



based on appearance, texture, uniformity, and other characteristics.

Nutrition Labels

The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA) of 1990 brought major changes to the food label. The labels provide:

- nutrition labeling for many foods
- information on the amount *per serving* of saturated fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber and other nutrients that are of major health concern
- nutrient reference values, expressed as Percent of Daily Values, that can help consumers see how a food fits into an overall daily diet
- uniform definitions for terms that describe a food’s nutrient content: “light,” “low-fat,” “high fiber,” etc.
- claims about the relationship between a nutrient and a disease, such as calcium and osteoporosis, or fat and cancer
- standardized serving sizes that make nutritional comparisons of similar products easier
- declaration of total percentage of juice in juice drinks
- voluntary nutrition information for many raw foods: seafood, meats and poultry, fruits and vegetables

The Nutrition Panel—“Nutrition Facts”

Under the label’s “Nutrition Facts” panel, manufacturers are required to provide information on certain nutrients. The mandatory (**bold**) and voluntary components, and the order in which they must appear, are:

- **total calories**
- **calories from fat**
- calories from saturated fat
- **total fat**
- **saturated fat**

- polyunsaturated fat
- monounsaturated fat
- **cholesterol**
- **sodium**
- potassium
- **total carbohydrate**
- **dietary fiber**
- soluble fiber
- insoluble fiber
- **sugars**
- sugar alcohol (for example, the sugar substitutes xylitol, mannitol and sorbitol)
- other carbohydrate (the difference between total carbohydrate and the sum of dietary fiber, sugars, and sugar alcohol, if declared)
- **protein**
- **vitamin A**
- percent of vitamin A present as beta-carotene
- **vitamin C**
- **calcium**
- **iron**
- other essential vitamins and minerals

If a claim is made about any

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 260	Calories from Fat 120
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 4%	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15%	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
Calories per gram:	
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

of the optional components, or if a food is fortified or enriched with any of them, nutrition information for these components becomes mandatory.

These mandatory and voluntary components are the only ones allowed on the Nutrition Facts panel. The listing of single amino acids, maltodextrin, calories from polyunsaturated fat, and calories from carbohydrates, for example, may not appear as part of the Nutrition Facts on the label.

The required nutrients were selected because they address today's health concerns. The order in which they must appear reflects the priority of current dietary recommendations.

Serving Sizes

The serving size remains the basis for reporting each food's nutrient content. However, unlike in the past, when the serving size was up to the discretion of the food manufacturer, serving sizes now are more uniform and reflect the amounts people actually eat. They also must be expressed in both common household and metric measures.

The FDA allows as common household measures: the cup, tablespoon, teaspoon, piece, slice, fraction (such as "1/4 pizza"), and common household containers used to package food products (such as a jar or tray). Ounces may be used, but only if a common household unit is not applicable and an appropriate visual unit is given: for example, 1 oz (28g / about 1/2 pickle). Grams (g) and milliliters (mL) are the metric units used in serving size statements.

The serving sizes that appear on food labels are based on FDA-established lists of "Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed Per Eating Occasion." These

reference amounts, which are part of the regulations, are broken down into 139 FDA-regulated food product categories, including 11 groups of foods specially formulated or processed for infants or children under 4. They list the amounts of food customarily consumed per eating occasion for each category, based primarily on national food consumption surveys. FDA's list also gives the suggested label statement for serving size declaration. For example, the category "breads (excluding sweet-quick type), rolls" has a reference amount of 50 g, and the appropriate label statement for sliced bread or roll is "___ piece(s) (_ g)" or, for unsliced bread, "2 oz (56 g/ _ inch slice)."

The serving size of products that come in discrete units—such as cookies, candy bars and sliced products—is the number of whole units that most closely approximates the reference amount. Cookies are an example. Under the "bakery products" category, cookies have a reference amount of 30 g. The household measure closest to that amount is the number of cookies that comes closest to weighing 30 g. Thus, the serving size on the label of a package of cookies in which each cookie weighs 13 g would read "2 cookies (26 g)."

If one unit weighs more than 50 percent, but less than 200 percent of the reference amount, the serving size is one unit. For example, the reference amount for bread is 50 g; therefore, the label of a loaf of bread in which each slice weighs more than 25 g would state a serving size of one slice.

Certain rules apply to food products that are packaged and sold individually. If such an individual package is less than 200 percent of the applicable

reference amount, the item qualifies as one serving. Thus, a 360-mL (12-fluid-ounce) can of soda is one serving, since the reference amount for carbonated beverages is 240 mL (8 ounces).

However, if the product has a reference amount of 100 g or 100 mL or more, and the package contains more than 150 percent but less than 200 percent of the reference amount, manufacturers have the option of deciding whether the product can be one or two servings.

An example is a 15-ounce (420 g) can of soup. The serving size reference amount for soup is 245 g. Therefore, the manufacturer has the option to declare the can of soup as one or two servings.

Daily Values—DRVs

The label reference value, Daily Value, comprises two sets of dietary standards: Daily Reference Values (DRVs) and Reference Daily Intakes (RDIs). To make label reading less confusing, only the Daily Reference Value term appears on the label.

DRVs have been established for macronutrients that are sources of energy: fat, saturated fat, total carbohydrate (including fiber), and protein; and for cholesterol, sodium and potassium, which do not contribute calories.

DRVs for the energy-producing nutrients are based on the number of calories consumed per day. A daily intake of 2,000 calories has been established as the reference. This level was chosen, because it approximates the caloric requirements for postmenopausal women. This group has the highest risk for excessive intake of calories and fat.

DRVs for the energy-producing nutrients are calculated as follows:

- fat based on 30 percent of calories
- saturated fat based on 10 percent of calories

- carbohydrate based on 60 percent of calories
- protein based on 10 percent of calories (The DRV for protein applies only to adults and children over 4. RDIs for protein for special groups have been established.)
- fiber based on 11.5 g of fiber per 1,000 calories

Because of current public health recommendations, DRVs for some nutrients represent the uppermost limit considered desirable. The DRVs for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium are:

- total fat: less than 65 g
- saturated fat: less than 20 g
- cholesterol: less than 300 mg
- sodium: less than 2,400 mg

Daily Values—RDIs

“Reference Daily Intake” replaced the term “U.S. RDA,” which was introduced in 1973 as a label reference value for vitamins, minerals and protein in voluntary nutrition labeling. The name was changed because of confusion that existed over “U.S. RDAs,” the values determined by FDA and used on food labels, and “RDAs” (Recommended Dietary Allowances), the values determined by the National Academy of Sciences for various population groups and used by the FDA to figure the U.S. RDAs.

Nutrient Content Claims

The regulations also spell out what terms may be used to describe the level of a nutrient in a food and how they can be used. These are the core terms:

Free. This term means that a product contains no amount of, or only trivial or “physiologically inconsequential” amounts of one or more of these components: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugars, and calories. For example, “calorie-free” means fewer than

5 calories per serving, and “sugar-free” and “fat-free” both mean less than 0.5 g per serving. Synonyms for “free” include “without,” “no” and “zero.” A synonym for fat-free milk is “skim.”

Low. This term describes foods that can be eaten frequently without exceeding dietary guidelines for one or more of these components: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and calories. Thus, descriptors are defined as follows:

- low-fat: 3 g or less per serving
- low-saturated fat: 1 g or less per serving
- low-sodium: 140 mg or less per serving
- very low sodium: 35 mg or less per serving
- low-cholesterol: 20 mg or less and 2 g or less of saturated fat per serving
- low-calorie: 40 calories or less per serving

Synonyms for low include “little,” “few,” “low source of,” and “contains a small amount of.”

Lean and extra lean. These terms can be used to describe the



fat content of meat, poultry, seafood, and game meats.

- *lean:* less than 10 g fat, 4.5 g or less saturated fat, and less than 95 mg cholesterol per serving and per 100 g
- *extra lean:* less than 5 g fat, less than 2 g saturated fat, and less than 95 mg cholesterol per serving and per 100 g



High. This term can be used if the food contains 20 percent or more of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient in a serving.

Good source. This term means that one serving of a food contains 10 to 19 percent of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient.

Reduced. This term means that a nutritionally altered product contains at least 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than the regular, or reference, product. However, a reduced claim can not be made on a product if its reference food already meets the requirement for a “low” claim.

Less. This term means that a food, whether altered or not, contains 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than the reference food. For example, pretzels that have 25 percent less fat than potato chips could carry a “less” claim. “Fewer” is an acceptable synonym.

Light. This descriptor can mean two things:

First, that a nutritionally altered product contains one-third fewer calories or half the fat of the reference food. If the food derives 50 percent or more of its calories from fat, the reduction must be 50 percent of the fat.

Second, that the sodium content of a low-calorie, low-fat food has been reduced by 50 percent. In addition, “light in sodium” may be used on food in which the sodium content has been reduced by at least 50 percent.

The term “light” still can be used to describe such properties as texture and color, as long as the label explains the intent: for example, “light brown sugar” or “light and fluffy.”

More. This term means that a serving of food, whether altered or not, contains a nutrient that is at least 10 percent of the Daily Value more than the reference food. The 10 percent of Daily Value also applies to “fortified,” “enriched,” “added,” and “extra and plus” claims, but in those cases, the food must be altered.

Alternative spelling of these descriptive terms and their synonyms is allowed—for example, “hi” and “lo”—as long as the alternatives are not misleading.

Healthy. A “healthy” food must be low in fat and saturated fat and contain limited amounts of cholesterol and sodium. In addition, if it is a single-item food, it must provide at least 10 percent of one or more of vitamins A or C, iron, calcium, protein, or fiber. Exempt from this “10-percent” rule are certain raw, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables and certain cereal-grain products. These foods may be labeled “healthy” if they do not contain ingredients that change the nutritional profile, and, in the case of enriched grain products, conform to standards of identity, which call for certain required ingredients. Meal-type products, such as frozen entrees and multi-course frozen dinners, must provide 10 percent of two or three of these vitamins or minerals or of protein or fiber, in addition to meeting the other criteria. The sodium content cannot exceed 360 mg per serving for individual foods and 480 mg per serving for meal-type products.

Other Definitions

The regulations also address other claims. Among them:

- **Percent fat-free:** A product bearing this claim must be a low-fat or a fat-free product. In addition, the claim must accurately reflect the amount of fat present in 100 g of the food. Thus, if a food contains 2.5 g fat per 50 g, the claim must be “95 percent fat-free.”
- **Implied:** These types of claims are prohibited when they wrongfully imply that a food contains or does not contain a meaningful level of a nutrient. For example, a product claiming to be made with an ingredient known to be a source of fiber (such as “made with oat bran”) is not allowed unless the product contains enough of that ingredient (for example, oat bran) to meet the definition for “good source” of fiber. As another example, a claim that a product contains “no tropical oils” is allowed, but only on foods that are “low” in saturated fat because consumers have come to equate tropical oils with high saturated fat.
- **Meals and main dishes:** Claims that a meal or main dish is “free” of a nutrient, such as sodium or cholesterol, must meet the same requirements as those for individual foods. Other claims can be used under special circumstances. For example, “low-calorie” means the meal or main dish contains 120 calories or less per 100 g. “Low-sodium” means the food has 140 mg or less per 100 g. “Low-cholesterol” means the food contains 20 mg cholesterol or less, per 100 g and no more than 2 g saturated fat. “Light” means the meal or main dish is low-fat or low-calorie.

- **Standardized foods:** Any nutrient content claim, such as “reduced fat,” “low calorie,” and “light,” may be used in conjunction with a standardized term if the new product has been specifically formulated to meet FDA’s criteria for that claim, if the product is not nutritionally inferior to the traditional standardized food, and if the new product complies with certain compositional requirements set by the FDA. A new product bearing a claim also must have performance characteristics similar to the referenced traditional standardized food. If the product doesn’t, and the differences materially limit the product’s use, its label must state the differences (for example, not recommended for baking) to inform consumers.

Health Claims

The intended purpose of health claims on the food label is to aid consumers by providing information on healthful eating patterns that may help reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, dental cavities, or certain birth defects. These claims (statements) alert consumers to a product’s health potential by stating that certain foods or food substances as part of an overall healthy diet may reduce the risk of certain diseases. Examples include folic acid in breakfast cereals, fiber in fruits and vegetables, calcium in dairy products, and calcium or folic acid in some dietary supplements. But food and food substances can qualify for health claims only if they meet FDA requirements. For health claims to be used, there needs to be sufficient scientific agreement among qualified experts that the claims are

factual and truthful. They can be used on conventional foods or dietary supplements.

FDA-Authorized Health Claims

Calcium and Osteoporosis

Low calcium intake is one risk factor for osteoporosis, a condition of lowered bone mass, or density. Lifelong adequate calcium intake helps maintain bone health by increasing as much as genetically possible the amount of bone formed in the teens and early adult life and by helping to slow the rate of bone loss that occurs later in life.

Typical Foods: Low-fat and skim milks, yogurts, tofu, calcium-fortified citrus drinks, and some calcium supplements.

Sample Claim: “Regular exercise and a healthy diet with enough calcium helps teen and young adult white and Asian women maintain good bone health, and may reduce their high risk of osteoporosis later in life.”

Sodium and hypertension (high blood pressure)

Hypertension is a risk factor for coronary heart disease and stroke deaths. The most common source of sodium is table salt. Diets low in sodium may help lower blood pressure and related risks in many people. Guidelines recommend daily sodium intakes of not more than 2,400 mg. Typical U.S. intakes are 3,000 to 6,000 mg.

Typical Foods: Unsalted tuna, salmon, fruits and vegetables, and low-fat milks, low-fat yogurts, cottage cheeses, sherbets, ice milk, cereal, flour, and pastas (not egg pastas).

Sample Claim: “Diets low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure, a disease associated with many factors.”

Dietary fat and cancer

Diets high in fat increase the risk of some types of cancer, such as cancers of the breast, colon and prostate. Scientists don’t know how total fat intake affects cancer development, but low-fat diets reduce the risk. Experts recommend that Americans consume 30 percent or less of daily calories as fat. Typical U.S. intakes are 37 percent.

Typical Foods: Fruits and vegetables.

Sample Claim: “Development of cancer depends on many factors. A diet low in total fat may reduce the risk of some cancers.”

Dietary saturated fat and cholesterol and risk of coronary heart disease

Diets high in saturated fat and cholesterol increase total and low-density (bad) blood cholesterol levels and, thus, the risk of coronary heart disease. Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol decrease the risk. Guidelines recommend that American diets contain less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat and less than 300 mg of cholesterol daily. The average American adult diet has 13 percent saturated fat and 300 to 400 mg of cholesterol a day.

Typical Foods: Fruits, vegetables, skim and low-fat milks, cereals, whole-grain products, and pastas (not egg pastas).

Sample Claim: “While many factors affect heart disease, diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of this disease.”

Fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables and cancer

Diets low in fat and rich in fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer. The exact role of total dietary fiber,

fiber components, and other nutrients and substances in these foods is not fully understood.

Typical Foods: Whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits, and vegetables.

Sample Claim: “Low-fat diets rich in fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer, a disease associated with many factors.”

Fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain fiber, particularly soluble fiber, and risk of coronary heart disease

Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol and rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain fiber, particularly soluble fiber, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. (It is impossible to adequately distinguish the effects of fiber, including soluble fiber, from those of other food components.)

Typical Foods: Fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals.

Sample Claim: “Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol and rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain some types of dietary fiber, particularly soluble fiber, may reduce the risk of heart disease, a disease associated with many factors.”

Fruits and vegetables and cancer

Diets low in fat and rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of some cancers. Fruits and vegetables are low-fat foods and may contain fiber or vitamin A (as beta-carotene) and vitamin C. (The effects of these vitamins cannot be adequately distinguished from those of other fruit or vegetable components.)

Typical Foods: Fruits and vegetables.

Sample Claim: “Low-fat diets rich in fruits and vegetables (foods that are low in fat and may contain dietary fiber, vitamin A, or vitamin C) may reduce the risk of some types of cancer, a disease associated with many factors. Broccoli is high in vitamins A and C, and it is a good source of dietary fiber.”

Folate and neural tube birth defects

Defects of the neural tube (a structure that develops into the brain and spinal cord) occur within the first six weeks after conception, often before the pregnancy is known. The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age in the United States consume 0.4 mg (400 mcg) of folic acid daily to reduce their risk of having a baby affected with spina bifida or other neural tube defects.

Typical Foods: Enriched cereal grain products, some legumes (dried beans), peas, fresh leafy green vegetables, oranges, grapefruit, and many berries.

Sample Claim: “Healthful diets with adequate folate may reduce a woman’s risk of having a child with a brain or spinal cord birth defect.”

Dietary sugar alcohol and dental caries (cavities)

Between-meal eating of foods high in sugar and starches may promote tooth decay. Candies and gums made with sugar alcohols do not.

Typical Foods: sugarless candy and gum.

Sample Claim: “Frequent between-meal consumption of foods high in sugars and starches promotes tooth decay. The sugar alcohols in this food do not promote tooth decay.” Shortened claim

(on small packages only): “Does not promote tooth decay.”

Dietary soluble fiber, such as that found in whole oats and psyllium seed husk, and coronary heart disease

When included in a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, soluble fiber may affect blood lipid levels, such as cholesterol, and thus lower the risk of heart disease. However, because soluble dietary fibers constitute a family of very different substances that vary greatly in their effect on the risk of heart disease, FDA has determined that sources of soluble fiber for this health claim need to be considered case-by-case.

To date, FDA has reviewed and authorized two sources of soluble fiber eligible for this claim: whole oats and psyllium seed husk.

Typical Foods: Oatmeal cookies, muffins, breads and other foods made with rolled oats, oat bran or whole oat flour; hot and cold breakfast cereals containing whole oats or psyllium seed husk; and dietary supplements containing psyllium seed husk.

Sample Claim: “Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol that include 3 g of soluble fiber from whole oats per day may reduce the risk of heart disease. One serving of this whole-oats product provides ___ grams of this soluble fiber.”

Fresh

The FDA has issued a regulation for the term “fresh.” The agency took this step because of concern over the term’s possible misuse on some food labels.

The regulation defines the term “fresh” when it is used to suggest that a food is raw or unprocessed. In this context, “fresh” can be used only on a food that is raw, has

never been frozen or heated, and contains no preservatives. (Irradiation at low levels is allowed.) “Fresh frozen,” “frozen fresh,” and “freshly frozen” can be used for foods that are quickly frozen while still fresh. Blanching (brief scalding before freezing to prevent nutrient breakdown) is allowed.

Other uses of the term “fresh,” such as in “fresh milk” or “freshly baked bread,” are not affected.

Nutrition Labeling— Exemptions

Under NLEA, some foods are exempt from nutrition labeling. These include:

- food served for immediate consumption, such as that served in hospital cafeterias and airplanes, food sold by service vendors
- ready-to-eat food not for immediate consumption but prepared primarily on site—

for example, bakery, deli, and candy store items

- food shipped in bulk, as long as it is not for sale in that form to consumers
- medical foods, such as those used to address the nutritional needs of patients with certain diseases
- plain coffee and tea, some spices, and other foods that contain no significant amounts of nutrients

Food produced by small businesses also may be exempt, under 1993 amendments to the NLEA.

Although certain foods may be exempt, they may carry nutrition information, when appropriate, as long as it complies with regulations. These foods will lose their exemption if their labels carry a nutrient content or health claim or any other nutrition information.

Nutrition information about game meats such as: deer, bison, rabbit, quail, wild turkey, and

ostrich, is not required on individual packages. Instead, it can be given on counter cards, signs, or other point-of-purchase materials. Because few nutrient data exist for these foods, FDA believes that allowing this option will enable game meat producers to give first priority to collecting appropriate data and make it easier for them to update the information as it becomes available.

References

For more information available on food labeling: <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/label.html>

Adapted from: U. S. Food and Drug Administration, FDA Backgrounder, The Food Label, BG 99-5, May 1999.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Revised Labeling Requirements for “Fresh” Raw Poultry Products Backgrounder, December 1996.

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

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