



# Wellness Buddy Wednesday Tip

## Take Action! Be a Food Label Reader

Reading labels can help you make informed food choices. The most important source of nutrition information on food products is the Nutrition Facts panel or box. Most foods are required to have a Nutrition Facts panel somewhere on the package. Exceptions include fresh fruits and vegetables, foods prepared in the store, and packages that are very small.

At the top of the Nutrition Facts section you'll find an important piece of information: the serving size. The rest of the nutrition information on the label is based on this serving size so the first step in label reading is to look at the serving size and compare it to what you usually eat. To make this easier, serving sizes are given in both familiar amounts such as cups or pieces as well as in metric units like grams.

Next to serving size, also find servings per container. This information will also make it easier for you to judge if you're eating one or two or more servings.

The next section of the Nutrition Facts label will tell you how many calories are contained in a single serving of the product. You can use the food label to help you compare the calorie content of two or more similar products.

Looking down the Nutrition Facts panel, the next section you'll see will provide information on fat. Total fat tells you how much fat is in one serving of a particular food. Total fat includes both good fats like monounsaturated fats that can help you lower your cholesterol and harmful fats like trans fat and saturated fat that can raise "LDL" or lousy cholesterol and may increase your risk of heart disease. Because of this health risk, saturated fat content is listed separately on the label below total fat.

Chili with Beans	
Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size: 1 cup (253 g)	
Servings per container: 2	
Amount per serving	
Calories 260	Calories from Fat 72
% Daily Value	
<b>Total Fat</b> 8g	13%
Saturated Fat 3g	17%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 130mg	44%
<b>Sodium</b> 1010mg	42%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 22g	7%
Dietary Fiber 9g	36%
Sugars 4g	
<b>Protein</b> 25g	

Beginning with Total Fat, you'll also see a section on the right hand side of the Nutrition Facts Label that lists Percent Daily Values. This section shows you how much of a specific nutrient is in one serving of a given food compared to recommendations for a whole day's meals.

Daily Values are average levels of nutrients for a person eating 2,000 calories a day. If you need more or fewer calories, your Daily Value would be different.

The Percent Daily Value can help you decide if a serving of food is high or low in a nutrient. A Percent Daily Value of 5% or less is considered low while 20% or more is high. Aim to choose food with a low percent daily value of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. Look for foods with a high percent daily value of vitamins, minerals and fiber. The Percent Daily Value can be used to compared similar foods so that you choose those that are low or high in specific nutrients.

The next stop of the Nutrition Facts panel is sodium. The food label is a great tool to help you search out hidden sodium in foods like salad dressing, packaged rice and grain mixes, processed meats, canned soups and other high-sodium processed foods.

Below sodium, you'll find total carbohydrate content, listed in grams. This number includes complex carbohydrates, sugar and fiber. The fiber and sugar content are broken out and shown beneath total carbohydrates.

In addition to the Nutrition Facts label there is other information on food packages that can be helpful. Foods with more than one ingredient must display a list of ingredients somewhere on the package. Ingredients are listed by weight from most to least. This means that ingredients listed at the beginning of the list are present in the greatest amounts. Generally, the first three ingredients listed make up the bulk of the product.

Keep in mind, if you become a **Nutrition Facts Label Reader** you'll be able to provide the healthiest meals for both you and your family.

**Have a healthy and safe day!**

Healthy Communities, Healthy People Program  
Jackson Co Health Department  
P O Box 310  
3045 4th Street  
Marianna, FL 32447

Phone: 850.526.2412 ext 282  
Fax: 850.428.9564  
Email: [WellnessBuddy@doh.state.fl.us](mailto:WellnessBuddy@doh.state.fl.us)



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