

READING FOOD LABELS

Anna's new family has learned a lot about **nutrition**. **Bill** and his children now eat differently. Now they eat more **healthful foods**. **Bill** eats more than just **meat, potatoes**, and **desserts**. **Bill's** son **Tim** is no longer a picky eater. And, **Bill's** teenage daughter **Kay** is developing a real interest in **nutrition**. **Kay** wants to know more. She wants to know how to read **food labels**.

Anna and **Kay** visit the local **Cooperative Extension Service Office**. They meet **Ms. Lara**, who works at the **Cooperative Extension Service Office**. They ask her for help. **Ms. Lara** talks to them. She gives them information to read. **Anna** and **Kay** learn about **food labels**. They learn how to read **food labels**.

WHY DO FOODS HAVE LABELS?

Anna and **Kay** have noticed that **foods**, like **cookies, bread**, and **milk**, have **labels**. **Foods**, like **fresh fruits** and **vegetables**, do not have **labels**. **Ms. Lara** says that **packaged foods** must have **labels**. The **labels** give buyers accurate information about the **foods** they purchase. **Food labels** also help consumers keep **food** safe. **Ms. Lara** says that the U.S. **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** requires **labels**. The **FDA** also tests **foods** to see that the **labels** are correct.

Ms. Lara says that other **foods** sometimes have **labels**, too. For instance, some **producers** of **fresh vegetables** and **fruits** choose to provide **labels**. These **labels** also provide **nutritional** information, such as number of **calories** or amount of **minerals** or **vitamins**. These **labels** are not on each **fruit** or **vegetable**. Instead, this information is usually placed near **vegetable** or **fruit** displays in stores. **Ms. Lara** tells **Anna** and **Kay** to look for such information at their **grocery store** or ask for help there. **Ms. Lara** says that some **restaurants** provide **nutrition** information about their **foods** as well.

WHAT DO FOOD LABELS SHOW?

Anna and **Kay** find out that **labels** give information about the contents of a **package**. **Labels** list the **ingredients** of the **food** in the **package**. **Labels** show **serving** sizes. **Labels** describe the **nutrition** of the **food**. **Labels** also tell how to use and **store** the **food** safely.

Contents

Labels list **ingredients** when a **food** has more than one **ingredient**. These are the items used to make the **packaged food**. The **ingredients** are placed in decreasing order of amount. This means that the ingredient that is the largest part of the **food** is shown first. A **package** of **cookies** with a **food label** that lists **enriched flour** as the first **ingredient** should provide more **vitamins** and **minerals** than if **sugar** were listed first.

The **label** also describes how the **food** is **packaged**. A **food** can be **packaged** by **weight**, **volume**, or **count**. The **label** also shows if the **food** is whole, sliced, or in other pieces. **Anna** should always check the **ingredients** list, especially if a family member has **food allergies** or wants to avoid certain **ingredients** for other reasons.

Nutrition Facts Panel

Nutrition Facts are shown in a special panel on the back or side of a **package**. This panel describes the **health** value of a **food** by **serving** size. Many of these facts are given as **percent** of **daily requirements**. The **percentages** are based on a 2000-**calorie** per day **diet**. This information helps **Anna** see how a **food** fits into daily **food** choices. Some facts must be included. This means the **food's producer** has to put that information on the **label**. The **label** may include other information. This means the **food producer** can choose whether or not to put that information on the **label**.

The format of **nutrition facts** differs for some **foods**, especially for **foods** designed for children under two years. These **nutrition facts** do not show **fat** content or **calories** that come from **fat**. Some parents may think they should

limit their young child's **fat** intake. This is not true. **Fat** is important for growth and development for young children.

Anna and **Kay** look at an example of a **Nutrition Facts Panel** (See Figure 1). They find that **nutrition facts** include **servings** information, **calorie** information, and **nutrient** information.

Serving Information

A **servings** size is shown as an amount of a **food** eaten at one time. This **servings** size is not always the same as the **servings** size on **MyPyramid** and may not be the amount of **food** that a person usually eats as a **servings**. **Anna** learns that she needs to use **MyPyramid** to help her plan her family's **meals** and **snacks**. **Anna** also learns that she must always read **food labels** to be sure that she knows how many **servings** the **food** provides. For instance, a **label** may list a **hot dog** bun as one **servings**. But, a **hot dog** bun equals two **servings**, or two ounces, according to the **MyPyramid**. Another example is **pasta**. A **servings** on the **MyPyramid** is **one-half cup**, or one ounce. Most people eat at least **one cup** of **pasta**. **One cup** of **pasta** counts as two **servings**. **Servings** sizes have to be listed in both **metric** and common **household** amounts. Household units are the following: **cup**, **tablespoon**, **teaspoon**, piece, slice, or **fraction** (such as $\frac{1}{8}$ **pizza** or $\frac{1}{2}$ **pickle**). **Ounces** are sometimes used if another unit is not appropriate. This section also explains how many total **servings** are in the container. The **Nutrition Facts label** in Figure 1 shows **Anna** that there are four **one-half cup servings** in the container.

Calorie Information

A **label** must show the total number of **calories** and **calories** from **fat**. The **Nutrition Facts panel** in Figure 1 shows **Anna** and **Kay** that there are 250 **calories** in each **one cup servings**. Of those 250 **calories**, 110 **calories** come from **fat**. If she eats two **servings**, she doubles the **calories** and **nutrients**.

Nutrient Information

Nutrient information is given in **metric** units (e.g., **grams** or **milligrams** per **serving**). This information is also given as **percent daily value (%DV)**. These **percentages** help **consumers** determine how a **food** contributes to their **diets**. The **%DV** also helps **consumers** compare **nutrients** between **foods**. In general, if the **%DV** is 5% or below, the **food** is a **low** source of that **nutrient**. If the **%DV** is 20% or more, the **food** is a **high** source of that **nutrient**.

Most Americans get enough (and sometimes too much) of **nutrients** such as **fats**, **cholesterol**, and **sodium**. These **nutrients** are listed first. In most cases, **consumers** should limit their intake of these **nutrients**. The total of the **percentages** for each of these **nutrients** should be no more than 100% each day. Trans fatty acids are not healthy to eat. Anna and Kay should select foods that contain few, if any trans fatty acids.

Next, a **label** must show the amount of total **carbohydrates** broken down by **dietary fiber** and **sugars**. A **label** must also include the amount of **protein** the **food** contains. These **nutrients** are not given in terms of **%DV**.

The **diets** of most Americans are often lacking in **vitamins** such as **vitamins A** and **C** as well as **minerals** like **calcium** and **iron**. These **nutrients** are listed last in the **Nutrition Facts Panel**. **Consumers** should be careful to get enough of these **nutrients** each day. Thus, **consumers** should try to get at least 100% or more of these **nutrients** each day.

FIGURE 1

A **serving** size is shown as an amount of a **food** eaten at one time. This **serving** size is not always the same as the **serving** size on the **MyPyramid** and may not be the amount of **food** that a person usually eats as a **serving**. **Anna** learns that she needs to use **MyPyramid** to help her plan her family's **meals** and **snacks**. **Anna** also learns that she must always read **food labels** to be sure that she knows how many **servings** the **food** provides. For instance, a **label** may list a **hot dog bun** as one **serving**. But, a **hot dog bun** equals two **servings** according to the **MyPyramid**. Another example is **spaghetti**. A **serving** on the **MyPyramid** is **one-half cup**, but most people eat at least **one cup** of **spaghetti**. **One cup** of **spaghetti** counts as two **servings**. **Serving** sizes have to be in both **metric** and common **household** amounts. Household units are the following: **cup**, **tablespoon**, **teaspoon**, **piece**, **slice**, or **fraction** (such as **1/8 pizza** or **1/2 pickle**). **Ounces** are sometimes used if another unit is not appropriate. This section also explains how many total **servings** are in the container. This **Nutrition Facts label** shows **Anna** that there are two **one cup servings** in the container.

Sample label for
Macaroni & Cheese

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
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

A **label** shows the total number of **calories** and **calories from fat**. The **Nutrition Facts panel** shows **Anna** and **Kay** that there are 250 **calories** in each **one cup serving**. Of those 250 **calories**, 110 **calories** come from **fat**. If she eats two **servings**, she doubles the **calories** and **nutrients**. **Anna** and **Kay** should select foods that contain few if any **trans fatty acids**.

Nutrient in **metric** or **milligram**. This information given as **percent Daily Value** (%DV) **percentage** **consumer** a **food** **contributes**. The **consumer** **nutrients** **limit** in general, or below, the source of the **%DV** is the **food** is that **nutrient**.

Many Americans eat much of such as **fat** and **sodium** cases, **contribute** limit their **nutrients**. **percentage** these **nutrients** no more than.

Next, a **label** amount of **carbohydrate** down by **dietary** **sugars**. **Labels** include the **protein** the **nutrients**. These **nutrients** given in terms of

The **diets** of Americans **vitamins** **A** and **C** as well as **calcium**. These **nutrients** last in the **label** **panel**. **Consumers** be careful of these **nutrients**. Thus, **consumers** to get at least of these **nutrients**.

Food Use and Safety

Anna and **Kay** were already using some information on the **label**. They knew that the **label** gave information about how the **food** should be used. They always carefully read **directions** for **preparing** and **cooking food**.

The **label** also lists how the **food** should be **stored**, such as refrigerate after opening. **Anna** and **Kay** had seen dates and special numbers on some **foods**. They found out that these dates show different points of **freshness**. One date may show when the **food** was **packaged**. A special number called a **lot number** may also be used to show when the **food** was **packaged**. Another date shows the last date when the **food** should be sold. This date allows time afterward for the **food** to be **stored** and used at home. A "best if used by" date is the date of best **freshness** for a food. The **food** should still be good to eat for a few days after this date. Finally, there may be an **expiration date**. It may be labeled "do not use after." **Anna** and **Kay** know that this is the last date that the **food** should be used.

Anna and **Kay** learn that **foods** like **eggs** and **fresh meats** are **graded** and **inspected**. The **label** should have a **grade shield** or **inspection mark**. These marks are used to show the quality and **freshness** of **foods**.

Anna and **Kay** know that a **label** should also show the name and address of the **food's packager**. This is useful in case **Anna**, **Kay**, or another **consumer** has a problem or concern about the **food**.

HOW DO LABELS DEFINE TERMS?

Anna and **Kay** learn that **food labels** must define terms in the same way. These terms help **consumers** compare **food** easily and fairly. **Anna** and **Kay** make a list that shows common **food** terms and their meanings (See Table 1).

TABLE 1: Food Label Terms

TERM	MEANING
FREE	Food contains no amount of or a very small amount. For example, calorie-free means fewer than 5 calories per serving . Sugar-free and fat-free mean less than .5 gram (1/2 gram) per serving . Words that mean the same as FREE include WITHOUT , NO , and ZERO . Fat-free milk is termed SKIM or NONFAT milk
LOW	Describes foods that can be eaten in large quantities without exceeding the daily value for the nutrient . For example, low-calorie means 40 calories or less per serving . Low-fat means 3 grams or less per serving . Words that mean the same as LOW are LITTLE , FEW , CONTAINS A SMALL AMOUNT OF , and LOW SOURCE OF .
LEAN	Describes fat content of foods in the meat group . For a serving of 100 grams (3.5 ounces), the food must have less than 10 grams of fat , 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat , and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol .
EXTRA-LEAN	Describes fat content of foods in the meat group . For a serving of 100 grams (3.5 ounces), the food must have less than 5 grams of fat , less than 2 grams of saturated fat , and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol .
HIGH	Describes foods with 20% or more of the Daily Value for a nutrient per serving . Words that mean the same as HIGH are RICH IN and EXCELLENT SOURCE .
GOOD SOURCE	Describes foods with 10 to 19% of the Daily Value for a nutrient per serving .
MORE	Describes foods (either nutritionally changed or regular) with 10% or more of the Daily Value for a nutrient per serving . If the food has been nutritionally changed by adding a nutrient , the label may read FORTIFIED , ENRICHED or EXTRA .
REDUCED	Describes a nutritionally changed food that has 25% less of sugar , fat , cholesterol , sodium or calories than the regular version. Reduced-fat milk (2%) contains 5 grams of fat compared to 8 grams of fat in “whole” milk .

LIGHT	Applies to number of calories or amount of fat or sodium (salt) content. When describing fat content, it means that a nutritionally-changed food has one-third less calories or one-half less fat or sodium than the regular version. If half or more of the calories in the regular version come from fat , the fat also has to be half or less.
FRESH	Means that a food is raw or not processed . This term can also be used to describe milk or bread products . Terms such as FRESH FROZEN, FROZEN FRESH, and FRESHLY FROZEN can be used if a food has been quickly frozen while still fresh .

USING INFORMATION ON FOOD LABELS

Anna and **Kay** now know how to use information on **food labels**. They know how to identify important **ingredients** in a **package**. They know how to read a **nutrition facts panel**. They know how to use and **store foods** safely. They understand terms used on a **package**. **Kay** will use this information to make **healthful food** choices. **Anna** will use this information to compare **foods** when she shops. **Anna** will also use this to provide **healthful snacks** for her family and serve more **healthful meals** on a budget.