

LABEL READING FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE EATING

Understanding nutrition information on packaged food labels can help athletes choose the best foods for top performance. Knowing how to make sense of the “Nutrition Facts” on a food label, helps you compare products easily and select the optimal diet for your unique training and sport scenarios.



Follow these 6 easy steps to read the Nutrition Facts labels

1 Start with the “Serving Size”. At the top of the label, you will see the serving size and the number of servings per container. Serving sizes differ even on similar types of foods. More important, the Serving Size on the label may not equal the serving size you normally eat. If you eat twice the serving listed on the label, you will need to double all the numbers in the nutritional facts section. Keep this in mind when you are looking at the label, as it may not be a healthy alternative if you are going to eat more than the suggested serving.

2 Percent Daily Value. Use the % daily value to see if a food has a little or a lot of a nutrient in the serving size. “% Daily Values” are based on a 2,000-calorie diet, *which is less than most athletes require on a daily basis*. So athletes should be cautioned that for their needs, % Daily Value makes the nutrient content of a food appear better than it really is.

3 Tally up the “Calories” and “Calories from Fat”. This section on the label tells you the total number of calories in each serving of the food and the number of those calories which are derived from fat. For example, one serving of macaroni and cheese may provide 250 calories, with 110 calories from fat. If you ate 2 servings, you would consume 500 calories and 220 of those calories would be from fat.

Add up the “Total Fat”. Total fat includes fats that are good for you, such as monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and omega-3 fats (usually from liquid and plant sources, such as canola oil and nuts) and fats that are not so good, such as saturated and trans fats (from animal or vegetable sources). Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats should count for most of the total fat. Saturated and trans fat should make up no more than 10% of the daily value.

Sample label for Macaroni & Cheese

Nutrition Facts

1		Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
		Serving Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving			
2	Calories 250	Calories from fat 110	
		% Daily Value*	
	Total Fat 12g	18%	
	Saturated Fat 3g	15%	
3	Trans Fat 3g		
	Cholesterol 30 mg	10%	
4	Sodium 470 mg	20%	
	Total Carbohydrates 31 g	10%	
5	Dietary Fiber 0 g	0%	
	Sugars 5 g		
	Protein 5 g		
	Vitamin A	4%	
	Vitamin C	2%	
6	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	65 g	80 g
Sat Fat	Less than	20 g	25 g
Cholesterol	Less than	300 mg	300 mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400 mg	2,400 mg
Total Carbohydrates		300 g	375 g
Dietary Fiber		25 g	30 g



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4 Look at the Sodium Content. Sodium is also known as table salt and it is a hidden ingredient in many foods, especially processed food. Health Canada recommends that we should limit our sodium intake to less than 2300mg/day (or about 1 tsp), so most non-athletes should select items with a sodium DV of <5% to 15%. However, athletes who typically lose large amounts of sweat and especially those at risk of hyponatremia should be encouraged to consume sodium-rich foods before, during, and after their sustained activities. Visit the tip sheet [Hyponatremia](#) for more information on preventing hyponatremia.

5 Check out the Carbohydrates. Carbohydrate provides energy to fuel your muscles and your brain during activity. Sugar is one type of carbohydrate listed; the carbohydrates not listed are mostly starch. Your diet should provide carbohydrate as the foundation for each meal. Refer to the tip sheet [Training Diet: Carbohydrate – Go Food](#) to find out exactly how much carbohydrate you need for your training and competition for your sport.

Fibre is also a carbohydrate listed with Nutrition Facts because it is essential for daily and long-term health. Some athletes choose to avoid eating foods high in fibre (3 grams or more per serving) before exercise, as it can cause gastrointestinal discomfort.

6 Look at the “Vitamins and Minerals”. The Nutrition Facts table is required by law to include information on calories and 13 ‘core’ nutrients. There are usually many other nutrients in labelled foods, but manufacturers are not obliged to list them.

Note: There are also Nutrition Claims that appear on some food labels, for example, ‘low sodium’, ‘low fat’, etc. For more information regarding these claims check out www.healthyeatinginstore.ca and/or www.hc-sc.gc.ca.

Finally, don’t forget to look at the ingredient list at the bottom of the label.

The list of ingredients is mandatory. All of the ingredients for a food are listed in descending order by weight. The ingredients present in the greatest amount in a product are listed first. The list of ingredients is also a source of information for people who want to avoid certain ingredients or verify the presence of an ingredient in a food.

Knowing how to read the nutrition information on food labels you will now be able to:

- Compare products more easily and identify high quality, high energy foods that will fuel your workouts and keep you healthy
- Find the nutritional value of foods
- Better manage your sport diet
- Increase or decrease your intake of a particular nutrient of interest

Contact a registered dietitian with an expertise in sport to help you plan your meals and select the right foods to meet your nutrient and energy needs. You can contact the dietitian at your [Canadian Sport Centre](#) or someone listed under the [Sport Nutrition Registry](#) on the CAC website. If there is no dietitian with expertise in sport listed in your area, [Dietitians of Canada](#) may list a dietitian near where you live. For more in-depth information about this topic refer to the Health Canada website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca or for more practical information go to www.healthyeatinginstore.ca.

