

In the Name of Health



Once you start at the TOP and begin to think about fitness and good health, the next step is to STOP. Stop eating junk food. Well, you don't have to stop altogether, just stop eating too much of those kinds of foods. Junk food may taste good, and you can still eat your favorites in small amounts, but junk foods do not provide the nutrients that your body needs. There is a reason it's called "junk."

Label Consciousness

The energy in food is measured in calories. The number of calories in your food determines how much energy your body will produce. And, as you read earlier, the extra energy you don't use ends up as fat. But, as the saying goes, "forewarned is forearmed." If you know about a problem headed your way, you can arm yourself and fight it off. So, if you know how many calories you're eating, you can avoid eating too many and head off the problem of having too much fat. How do you find out about how many calories are in the foods you eat? Simple, read the nutritional labels. That's why they're there. Those labels tell you everything you need to know about food. Product labels also give other information. Here is a typical food label for macaroni and cheese. You can see the section of the label titled "Nutrition Facts." This panel shows you key information about the healthfulness of the product.

FOOD LABEL ACTIVITY:

Pay attention to the serving size. The nutritional information on the package is based on the amount in a serving. But you should determine the nutritional content of the food you actually eat, not what the label says is a serving's worth. Consider this example: A serving of macaroni and cheese is 1 cup. The Nutrition Facts state that there are 2 servings in this package. So if you eat the whole package, you've actually eaten 2 servings and you'd have to double everything on the label to know what you've eaten.

Pay attention to what's in the food and what isn't. In our example, you can see that this macaroni and cheese has quite a bit of fat – 12 grams – and no fiber. As you make healthy choices, you'll want to look for foods that are low in fat but high in fiber. Aim for foods with less than 7 grams of fat and more than 3 grams of fiber. Reading labels when you can enables you to balance foods throughout the day. It's probably not realistic to think that young people will read the label of everything they eat and will never eat junk food. But here's what you can do. You can eat in balance. If some of your favorite foods are high in fat, sugar, or sodium, you don't have to stop eating them altogether. But you should try to balance them with other, healthier foods throughout the day. For example, if you eat a dessert with high fat content at lunch, don't eat another with dinner. Have an apple instead.

When no label is available, try this simple balancing act. Draw a picture of your meal on a plate.

*One-quarter of the plate should contain a protein source, such as fish, meat, poultry, soy, etc.

*One-quarter of the plate should contain a starch/carbohydrate, such as potatoes, rice (preferably brown rice), pasta, etc.

*One-half of the plate should contain vegetables.

Add a fruit for dessert, and, presto, you've got a balanced meal. And consider this – if you really want a dessert that's a bit high in sugar and fat, go ahead and have it, but have it instead of the starch/carbohydrate. See how it works? It's a matter of balance.

Sample label for
Macaroni & Cheese

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Serving Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving		Calories from Fat 110
Calories 250		
% Daily Value*		
Total Fat 12g		18%
Saturated Fat 3g		15%
Trans Fat 1.5g		
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

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