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Get Ready for the New Nutrition Facts Panel

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The Nutrition Facts Panel can help you make healthy choices at the grocery store, compare foods and products, and plan healthy meals. Information on the Nutrition Facts Panel also can help you reduce your risk for certain diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity, diabetes, and some forms of cancer.

As scientific research continues to explore new links between nutrition and overall health, the Nutrition Facts Panel will continue to evolve. The Nutrition Facts Panel is designed to include key nutrients of public health concern and information to make informed food choices and comparisons.

“Calories Count” is a report released by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and is designed to help tackle the nation’s obesity epidemic. The long- and short-term goals of the message are based on the scientific fact that weight control is mainly a function of caloric balance. Calories consumed or taken in must equal calories used in daily activity for weight maintenance.

For the first time since its debut in 1994 the Nutrition Facts Panel is about to change. All food labels will be required to include information on trans fats beginning January 1, 2006. The FDA also is considering additional changes to strengthen and reinforce the message “Calories Count.”

Recommended actions as part of the Calories Count message include:

- strengthen food labeling to educate consumers about maintaining a healthy diet and weight
- encourage restaurants to provide calorie and nutrition information
- increase enforcement to ensure food labels accurately portray serving size
- strengthen coordinated scientific research to reduce obesity and to develop foods that are healthier and low in calories
- define such terms as “low,” “reduced,” or “free” carbohydrates, as well as providing guidance for the use of the term “net” in relation to carbohydrate content of food, in light of increasing consumer interest in low carbohydrate diets and in response to petitions asking FDA to define these terms

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Nutrition Facts Panel Quiz

1. % Daily Values show how a food fits into a 2,000 calorie diet.
   - TRUE   FALSE

2. Similar products use the same serving sizes.
   - TRUE   FALSE

3. The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) have been incorporated into the Nutrition Facts Panel.
   - TRUE   FALSE

   - TRUE   FALSE

5. Polyunsaturated fats are required on the Nutrition Facts Panel.
   - TRUE   FALSE

6. ‘Calories from fat’ are more useful than ‘calories’ for weight control.
   - TRUE   FALSE

7. Eating a diet low in fat may help reduce your risk of heart disease.
   - TRUE   FALSE

8. Trans fats are required on the Nutrition Facts Panel.
   - TRUE   FALSE

   - TRUE   FALSE

10. Health claims are allowed on all foods.
    - TRUE   FALSE

(You’ll find the answers on page 3.)
Using the Nutrition Facts Panel

The Nutrition Facts Panel has two main sections. The top section (steps 1-5) contains product-specific information (serving size, calories, and nutrient information) that varies with each food product. The bottom section (step 6) contains a footnote, which is found only on larger packages and provides general dietary information about important nutrients. This format does not change among food products.

1. **Start here**
   Start at the serving size and the number of servings in the package. The serving size identified on the package determines all the nutrient amounts listed on the label.

   *It is important to pay attention to the serving size, including the number of servings in the package. Compare this to how much YOU actually eat.*

2. **Caloric Intake**
   Look at the calories and calories from fat. Calories are a measure of how much energy is in a serving of food.

   *Eating too many calories per day is linked to overweight and obesity; it doesn't matter if the calories are from protein, carbohydrate, or fat.*

3. **Macronutrients and Micronutrients**
   The Nutrition Facts Panel includes a number of nutrients that are important for your health. These have been separated into two main groups: macronutrients (#3 on sample label) and micronutrients (#4 on sample label).

4. **Macronutrients**
   Total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol are required on the Nutrition Facts Panel. Some products, usually margarines and oils, also include polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat; however, this information is optional. **Trans** fat amounts are required on all labels by January 1, 2006. When comparing foods, look at the Nutrition Facts Panel and choose the food with the lower amounts of saturated fat and **trans** fat. **Add the grams (g) of saturated fat and **trans** fat and look for products with the lowest combined amount.**

   Carbohydrates included on the Nutrition Facts Panel are total carbohydrate, dietary fiber, and sugars. Carbohydrate is an important source of energy for the body. The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) recommend a minimum intake of 130 grams of total carbohydrate daily.

   Dietary fiber is the part of plant foods that the body cannot digest. Lack of dietary fiber has been linked to increased risk of certain types of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. The DRI for fiber is 25 grams per day for adult women and 38 grams per day for adult men.

5. **Micronutrients**
   Vitamins and minerals, called micronutrients, are optional on the Nutrition Facts Panel. Americans often don’t get adequate amounts of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. Eating recommended amounts of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and health concerns.

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### Color codes for changes on the sample
- Red lettering indicates mandatory change to the label.
- Gray areas indicate parts of the label where changes are being considered.
%DV Guide
The % Daily Value helps you determine whether the nutrients (fat, sodium, fiber, etc.) in a serving of food contribute a little or a lot to your daily intake. The %DV is the percent of the recommended daily amount of a nutrient in a serving of food.

%DVs are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. The general guide is: 5%DV or less is considered a low source of the nutrient, while 20%DV or more is considered a high source of the nutrient.

Footnotes
The statement, “Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet” must appear on all Nutrition Facts Panels. The remaining part of the footnote is not required to appear on the Nutrition Facts Panel if the size of the label is too small. When the full footnote does appear, it will always be the same format, because it gives dietary recommendations for all Americans.

Daily Values footnotes do not reflect recent changes to the DRIs; the FDA will be reviewing the DRIs to update the reference values and develop a strategy to update the %DVs.

What are the DRIs?
The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) are quantitative estimates of nutrient intakes to be used for planning and assessing diets for healthy people. The DRIs include both recommended intakes and tolerable upper intake levels. The DRIs are determined by the Institute of Medicine, a private, non-profit organization that provides health policy advice under government funding to the National Academy of Sciences.

For more information
Visit these Web sites for more information about food labeling and other nutrition topics.
ISU Extension Nutrition—www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition
ISU Extension Distribution Center (online store)—www.extension.iastate.edu/store
ISU Answer Line—www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline/or call 800-262-3804 (for text/telephone, call 800-735-2942)
What about Calories?
One recommendation of the Calories Count message is to modify serving sizes to reflect the packaging of some convenience and snack foods. For example, a 20-ounce bottle of soda lists 8 ounces as a serving and thus has 2.5 servings per bottle. It has been recommended that all items individually packaged and perceived as a single serving, use 1 serving per package as the standard serving size.

Calories Count recommends giving more focus to calories on the food label. Possible changes include:
• increasing the type size for calories
• providing a percent Daily Value (%DV) for calories (based on 2,000 calories)
• eliminating “calories from fat” because this takes the emphasis away from “total calories”

Prepared by Ruth Litchfield, Ph.D., extension nutritionist, and Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist. Designed by Jane Lenahan, extension graphic designer.

What about Carbs?
Terms such as “net carbs,” “impact carbs,” and “effective carbs” also may appear on food products. Some food manufacturers are subtracting carbohydrates with a low blood glucose response (low glycemic index) from the total carbohydrate and referring to the remaining carbohydrates or those with a high glucose response (high glycemic index) as “net, impact or effective” carbs. Presently, the FDA has not defined these terms, nor the terms used for marketing the product such as “low,” “reduced,” or “free” carbohydrates.

The important fact to remember is that all carbohydrates have calories.

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What about Sugar?
There is no daily reference value for sugar because no recommendation has been made for total sugar intake in a day.

The sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts Panel include naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as those added to a food or drink.

To identify whether sugar has been added to the product, check the ingredient list and look for a form of sugar (such as sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, maltodextrin) in the first three ingredients.

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