



Decoding Food Labels: A Guide to Healthier Grocery Shopping Choices

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INTRODUCTION

Food labels are an essential and powerful tool in empowering consumers with the knowledge and insight they need to make well-informed decisions about the food they choose to consume. In an age where people are increasingly concerned about their health, nutrition, and overall well-being, food labels have become a central part of understanding what goes into the foods we eat. These labels provide a wealth of important information, including the nutritional value of the product, a comprehensive list of ingredients, and an assessment of the product's quality. By offering these details, food labels allow consumers to better understand the composition of their food, which can be critical in making choices that align with their personal health goals, preferences, and dietary needs. In addition to helping individuals make healthier decisions, food labels are also carefully regulated by government agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States, to ensure that the information provided is accurate, truthful, and clear. These regulations are in place to protect consumers from misleading or false claims, providing a standard of transparency and consistency across the food industry. This regulation ensures that the details on food packaging are not only reliable but also easy to interpret, making it easier for consumers to compare products and choose the ones that best meet their needs (Guimaraes et al., 2023).

For people with specific dietary restrictions, allergies, or health conditions, the ability to properly read and understand food labels is even more critical. For example, individuals with



food allergies or intolerances need to carefully examine ingredient lists to avoid potential allergens, such as nuts, gluten, or dairy, which could cause serious health reactions. Similarly, people managing chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, or heart disease rely on food labels to assess the nutritional content of the foods they consume, such as checking for sugar content, sodium levels, or healthy fats. Properly interpreting food labels in these contexts becomes not just a convenience but a necessity for maintaining good health and avoiding potential medical complications. Moreover, food labels serve as an indispensable tool in guiding individuals toward healthier, more mindful eating habits. By providing key details like calorie counts, serving sizes, and information about macronutrients like fats, proteins, and carbohydrates, food labels enable consumers to make choices that align with their personal health objectives, whether they are aiming for weight management, improving heart health, or ensuring they are getting enough essential vitamins and minerals.

In a broader sense, food labels help raise awareness about the nutritional quality of the food products we consume, encouraging both manufacturers and consumers to place a greater emphasis on healthier, more sustainable food choices. As consumers become more knowledgeable and empowered through food labels, the food industry may be encouraged to create better, more transparent products that align with the growing demand for healthier, more nutritious, and ethically produced foods. Ultimately, food labels are not only a reflection of consumer preferences and health-conscious behavior but also a critical component of a larger movement toward promoting public health and well-being (Taub-Dix, 2010).



The Purpose of Food Labels:

Food labels serve several purposes

- **Informing Consumers:** Labels play a crucial role in guiding consumers by offering essential information that enables them to make healthier, more informed decisions. They highlight important details such as nutritional content, ingredients, and allergens, helping individuals select products that align with their dietary needs and preferences. Additionally, clear labeling can empower consumers to understand the environmental and ethical practices behind a product, fostering more conscious purchasing habits. By making this information easily accessible, labels promote better decision-making and encourage healthier lifestyles (Alevizou, 2023).
- **Nutritional Guidance:** Labels provide valuable insights into the nutritional content of foods, which is especially important for individuals who are monitoring specific nutrients, such as carbohydrates, fats, and vitamins. This detailed information allows

consumers to track their intake more effectively, ensuring they meet their dietary goals or manage conditions like diabetes or heart disease. For those following specialized diets, such as low-carb or high-protein, labels serve as an essential tool for making well-informed food choices. Furthermore, nutritional labeling supports a more balanced and mindful approach to eating, encouraging individuals to make decisions that are in line with their health needs.

- **Allergen Identification:** Labels play a vital role in safeguarding individuals with allergies by clearly listing common allergens, such as peanuts, gluten, dairy, and shellfish. This transparency helps prevent accidental exposure to ingredients that could trigger allergic reactions, offering peace of mind to consumers. For people with food sensitivities or severe allergies, knowing exactly what's in a product is crucial for their health and safety. Additionally, food labels often provide detailed information about potential cross-contamination risks, further protecting individuals who must avoid specific allergens. By making allergen information easily accessible, labels contribute to a safer and more inclusive food environment Hollywood
- **Product Transparency:** Labels provide transparency by disclosing ingredients and additional details that highlight a product's authenticity, quality, and origin. This information allows consumers to assess the integrity of what they are purchasing, ensuring they are getting a product that meets their standards. For example, labels may indicate whether a product is organic, locally sourced, or made with sustainably sourced ingredients, offering insight into its environmental and ethical impact. By revealing such details, labels help consumers make choices that align with their values, whether they prioritize high-quality ingredients, ethical sourcing, or specific dietary needs. In this way, labels not only inform but also build trust between brands and their customers.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Food labels play a critical role in ensuring that manufacturers adhere to both national and international food safety regulations, providing consumers with assurance that products are safe to consume. By clearly displaying required

information, such as expiration dates, storage instructions, and safety certifications, labels help maintain high standards of food quality and hygiene. These regulations are in place to prevent contamination and protect public health, ensuring that products meet stringent safety requirements throughout the production and distribution process. Additionally, by complying with these guidelines, manufacturers demonstrate their commitment to consumer well-being, fostering confidence in the products they offer. Labels, therefore, serve as a key safeguard, reinforcing the integrity of the food supply chain.

A Guide to Making Healthier Grocery Purchases:



Pollicious Protein & Delicious

MILLET VERMICELLI

Tasty food can be healthy!
With the same belief we carefully choose the best ingredients to curate delicious foods rich in plant-based protein. We make the journey of meeting your protein goals fun, tasty & healthy.

Cooking Instructions—

Step 1: Boil
Heat 1 cup of water in 1-2 litres of water. Add 1/2 cup of millet vermicelli. Boil for 10-12 minutes. Drain the water, add salt to taste, and keep aside.

Step 2: Sauté
Heat 1/2 cup of oil in a pan. Add 1/2 cup of millet vermicelli. Sauté for 5-6 minutes. Add salt to taste.

Step 3: Mix & Enjoy!
Add the sautéed vermicelli and cook for 2-3 minutes. Add salt to taste. Mix well and enjoy!

NUTRITION FACTS

Serving size 45g*	Per 100g	% Daily Value
Energy (kcal)	344	100
Protein (g)	22	44
Total Fat (g)	1.5	3
Total Sugars (g)	0	0.0
Added Sugars (g)	0	0.0
Total Dietary Fibre (g)	11	22
Total Fat (g)	1.5	3
Saturated Fat (g)	0.1	0.2
Cholesterol (mg)	0	0.0
Sodium (mg)	54	1.2

Ingredients: Millet, Millet Flour (25%), Durum Wheat Flour, Peanut Flour, Sunflower Oil.

Allergen Info: Contains Peanuts, Wheat. Processed in a facility that handles Oats.

Notes: For a nut, soy and sesame allergy, avoid from recipe. Once opened, ensure that the pouch is well sealed.

Barcode: 8142121022414

MADE IN INDIA

Decoding Indian Nutrition

NUTRITION FACTS

Serving size 45g*	Qty Per 100g	Qty Per 45g	% RDA * Per Serve
Energy (kcal)	344	155	8
Protein (g)	22	10	22
Carbohydrate (g)	66	30	23
Total Sugars (g)	0	0.0	0.0
Added Sugars (g)	0	0.0	0.0
Total Dietary Fibre (g)	11	5	12
Total Fat (g)	1.5	0.7	1
Saturated Fat (g)	0.1	0.06	0.3
Trans Fat (g)	0	0.0	0.0
Cholesterol (mg)	0	0.0	—
Sodium (mg)	54	24	1.2

1. Start with the Serving Size:

The serving size is the key starting point for the entire nutrition label. All the nutritional details are based on this amount, so it's important to make sure it aligns with what actually consuming. For instance, if the serving size is listed as 1 cup, but you eat 2 cups, need to

double the values for calories, fat, and other nutrients.

2. Look at the Ingredient List:

Ingredients are listed in descending order, starting with the highest quantity. If sugar, refined flour, or unhealthy oils are listed near the top, it's a good idea to reconsider if it's the healthiest option. Ideally, whole foods like vegetables, whole grains, and natural oils should be among the first ingredients.

3. Check for Added Sugars:

Added sugars are a major contributor to poor diet choices. Many packaged foods sneak in hidden sugars, which can lead to weight gain and various health problems. Always check the ingredients list for added sugars, and pay attention to the "Added Sugars" section in the nutrition facts. Keep your sugar intake low and try to avoid foods where sugar is listed near the top of the ingredient list..

4. Be Cautious of Trans Fats and Saturated Fats:

Trans fats and excessive saturated fats can raise cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease. Trans fats are often found in processed foods and baked goods, while saturated fats are typically in animal products and certain plant oils. Opt for products with 0 grams of trans fats and aim to limit saturated fat to keep heart in good shape.

5. Make Fiber is Friend:

A high-fiber diet plays a key role in supporting digestive health, managing weight, and helping you stay full longer. Look for foods that offer at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. Whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are some of the best sources, so choose products that prominently feature these ingredients.

6. Pay Attention to % Daily Value (%DV):

The %DV on nutrition labels shows how much a nutrient in one serving contributes to your overall daily needs. To maintain a balanced diet, aim for foods with a low %DV for saturated

fats, sodium, and added sugars, while looking for a higher %DV for fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

7. Be Skeptical of “Health Claims”:

Products claiming to be "low-fat," "gluten-free," or "natural," but these labels can sometimes be misleading. For example, "low-fat" doesn't necessarily mean low-calorie, and "gluten-free" isn't automatically healthier for everyone. Instead of relying on these claims, take a closer look at the ingredients and nutrition facts to make more informed choices.

8. Understand Nutritional Goals:

Everyone's health needs are unique, so it's key to define your own dietary objectives. Whether aiming to reduce sodium, boost protein, or increase intake of vitamins, having a clear understanding the goals that focus on the nutrients that matter most when reading food labels.

9. Be Conscious of Portion Sizes:

Portion sizes can easily be overlooked, especially if a package contains multiple servings. Keep in mind that the "serving size" listed might not reflect what actually eat.

10. Trust Intuition:

Food labels can sometimes be tricky, filled with confusing terms and numbers. If a product feels overly processed or far from its natural state, it might not be the healthiest option. Aim to choose fresh, whole foods as much as possible and use labels to help on packaged products.

Conclusion

Decoding food labels is a crucial skill when it comes to making healthier choices during your grocery trips. With a little practice, you can learn to navigate labels with confidence and make smarter decisions about what you're putting into your body. Start by understanding your unique nutritional goals whether it's cutting back on sugar, increasing fiber, or boosting your vitamin intake and use labels to help guide those choices. Being mindful of portion sizes is also key, as

what's listed on the package may not always align with how much you're actually consuming. Trusting your instincts can go a long way too; if a product seems overly processed or far from its natural form, it might not be the best option for your health. Ultimately, it's not just about focusing on the numbers, but about prioritizing whole, nutrient-rich foods that meet your specific needs. Armed with these strategies, you'll be better prepared to make informed choices, shop smarter, and support your long-term health goals with every trip to the store.

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