

NUTRITIONAL THERAPY *for* IBD

Decoding the Mystery: Making Sense of Food Labels



Making healthy food choices is one of the most important things you can do for your overall health and well-being. With all the different claims on food packaging, it can be hard to make sense of how healthy a product really is. Often, food labels can be misleading and difficult to decipher. This guide will help you navigate the terminology and nutrition information on a food package to ensure that you make an informed decision on what you are buying.

The nutrition facts and ingredient list will be more important to examine than the health claims on the front packaging.

NUTRITION FACTS

The Nutrition Fact Label contains product-specific information and can usually be found on the side or back of the package. **A typical nutrition label is comprised of several key sections: serving size, calories, nutrients, and footnotes.**

SERVING SIZE

It is worth noting that The Nutrition Facts Label is based on a specific portion size. Often, the serving size is much less than one would typically consume in one sitting. If you consume more than what is listed, your intake could be misleading as you need to adjust the numbers on the whole Nutrition Label. For example, a snack pack might say it contains 150 calories per serving, but if you eat two servings, you consume 300 calories. **A serving size is not a recommendation for everyone about how much to eat, but rather a reference point.**

NUTRIENTS

The nutrients section highlights essential components like fats, carbohydrates, proteins, sodium, fiber, cholesterol, vitamins, and minerals. **Use this section of the label to help you choose foods that contain more of the specific nutrients that you want and less of those you want to limit.**

Based on recommendations put forth by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar are nutrients listed on the label that have been linked to adverse health conditions and should be limited. **Choose foods that have higher values of dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium.**

% DAILY VALUE

Next to many nutrients, the percentage (%) indicates how much of the daily recommended intake one serving contributes. This can guide you in evaluating whether a food product is high or low in specific nutrients.

- A value of 5% or less is considered low
- A value of 20% or more is considered high

For example, if a food item has 500 mg of sodium and the daily value is 2,300 mg, the label will show about 22%. This indicates that one serving contributes a significant portion towards your daily sodium intake.

NATURAL SUGAR VS. ADDED SUGAR

The nutrition label will list the total number of grams of sugar and the amount of added sugar the product contains. The total sugar content includes both naturally occurring sugar and added sugar.

Natural sugars are found naturally in foods like fruit (fructose) and dairy (lactose). **Added sugars include any sugars or sweeteners that have been added to the product during processing, preparation, or manufacturing.**

HIDDEN NAMES FOR SUGAR

Many manufacturers use different names to avoid alarming consumers about the amount of sugar in the product. This list includes some of the more common hidden names that sugar may be disguised as to help you determine what ingredients to look for if you want to limit sugar.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Agave Nectar | Barley Malt | Beet Sugar |
| Brown Sugar | Cane Juice | Cane Sugar |
| Caramel | Carob Syrup | Castor Syrup |
| Coconut Sugar | Confectioner's Sugar | Corn Sweetener |
| Corn Syrup | Crystalline Fructose | Date Sugar |
| Dextrin | Dextrose | Ethyl Maltol |
| Fructose | Fruit Juice | Fruit Juice Concentrates |
| Galactose | Glucose | Grape Sugar |
| High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) | | Honey |
| Lactose | Malt Syrup | Maple Syrup |
| Maltodextrin | Maltose | Molasses |
| Nectar | Rice Syrup | Saccharose |
| Sorbitol | Sucrose | Turbinado Sugar |

Amount per serving	% Daily Value*
Calories 280	
Total Fat 9g	12%
Saturated Fat 4.5g	23%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 850mg	37%
Total Carbohydrate 34g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 6g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 15g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 320mg	25%
Iron 1.6mg	8%
Potassium 510mg	10%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Amount per serving	% Daily Value*
Calories 230	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 240mg	6%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Amount per serving	% Daily Value*
Calories 280	
Total Fat 9g	12%
Saturated Fat 4.5g	23%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 850mg	37%
Total Carbohydrate 34g	12%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 6g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 15g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 320mg	25%
Iron 1.6mg	8%
Potassium 510mg	10%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.



INTERPRETING THE INGREDIENT LIST

THE ORDER OF INGREDIENTS

The ingredient list arranges items in descending order by weight. **This means the first few ingredients are most prominent, forming the bulk of the product. Looking at the first three ingredients can tell you a lot about the product's quality.** For instance, if the first three ingredients in a product are whole foods that you can recognize (such as fruits, vegetables, or whole grains), you're likely looking at a healthier option. On the other hand, if they include high fructose corn syrup, sugars, or hydrogenated oils, it's a sign that it is a much heavier processed product that may lack nutrition.

ADDITIVES AND PRESERVATIVES

Lower down on the list, you may find ingredients added for flavor, texture, or longevity. **While not all additives and preservatives are considered harmful, they still are chemical agents added to the food to change the natural structure and consumption should be minimized as part of a healthy diet.** Commonly recognized additives to consider limiting include:

Artificial Colors and Dyes
Artificial Sweeteners
(including aspartame, saccharin and sucralose)
Butylated Hydroxyanisole (BHA)
Butylated Hydroxytoluene (BHT)
Carrageenan
High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS)
Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)
Polysorbate 80
Potassium Bromate
Propyl Paraben
Propylene Glycol
Sodium Nitrite and Nitrate
Trans fat or partially hydrogenated oils

NATURAL VS. ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS

Added flavors are meant to enhance the flavor, not the nutritional value, of a processed food product. **The source of an artificial flavor is a synthetic chemical and should be limited as part of a healthy diet.**

Terms like "natural flavors" can be vague and don't always indicate a healthier choice. The source of natural flavors must be from a plant or animal material. However, they are still complex mixtures that are created by a food chemist and can contain many chemical additives, making them highly processed ingredients. There may be a lack of transparency about manufacturing processes and additives used since the term "natural" can widely vary. It is best to opt for a label that states "organic" natural flavors to decrease exposure to unwanted chemicals.

ORGANIC, GRASS-FED AND PASTURE-RAISED

Each label sheds light on farming practices affecting animal welfare, nutrition, and environmental sustainability. Here is a summary of what each label stands for:

- **Organic:** Organic agriculture forbids the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, and antibiotics while requiring that animals be fed organic feed and have outdoor access. A key feature of organic farming is it prohibits genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Organic produce is less likely to be sprayed with pesticides and other chemicals.
- **Grass-Fed:** Refers to the animal's diet during the time it was raised. Grass-fed means livestock primarily eat grass and are allowed to forage in their natural environment.
- **Pasture-raised, Free-Range, and Cage-Free:** Refers to the living conditions of the animal. "Pasture-raised" specifically refers to animals raised with significant outdoor grazing access, which allows livestock to engage in their natural behaviors, which can enhance their health and well-being.

FOOD LABEL CERTIFICATIONS

These certifications are issued by third party companies to verify that the products, methods and systems used by the product's manufacture meets various food safety standards.



This certification means that the product meets or exceeds the USDA's minimum standard of 95% organic ingredients.



This certifies that the product contains less than ten parts per million (ppm) of gluten.



All meat, poultry and egg products must be labeled with a USDA mark of inspection and establishment number which is assigned to the plant where the product was produced.



This label verifies that the product does not contain glyphosate, the world's most-used herbicide.



The product must be fully compliant with the standards of having no traces of genetically modified ingredients.



The National Sanitation Foundation label signifies a food product meets the public health and safety standards set by the NSF.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With a bit of additional knowledge on reading food labels, you will be better equipped to make healthier food choices that align with your dietary preferences. You can learn more by visiting the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at www.fda.gov.

Nutritional Therapy for IBD is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing evidence-based nutrition as part of IBD treatment to enhance the well-being and health outcomes of all children and adults with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. Please note that Nutritional Therapy for IBD does not provide medical advice. This content is provided for informational purposes only. Please consult with your healthcare provider for specific dietary guidance.

