Food Labels: Fat & Cholesterol

Health experts recommend keeping your intake of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet. These nutrients are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much.

Eating too much total fat, saturated fat, trans fat or cholesterol may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, like heart disease, high blood pressure and some cancers.

Facts on Food Labels
Food labels contain clues to a food’s fat and cholesterol content, including the amount per serving. Compare similar foods and select the one with the smallest amounts of fat and cholesterol.

Two important parts of a food label are the "Nutrition Facts" panel, which contains nutrition information, and the ingredients list. In addition, some labels contain a nutrient claim, such as "low-fat" or "fat-free."

"Nutrition Facts" Panel: Since 1994 food manufacturers have been required to provide information on certain nutrients of greatest public concern. As a result, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol are required under the Nutrition Facts panel of food labels. Information on the content of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat is optional.

The Nutrition Facts label shows you how much fat is in a product, even if the fat is hidden as an ingredient. The serving size and the nutrients listed on this label are consistent, which makes it easy to compare similar products without any calculations.

% Daily Values (% DVs) are listed in a column on the "Nutrition Facts" label. By looking at these percentages, you easily can determine whether a food contributes a lot or a little of a particular nutrient to your daily diet.

Use % DV as your guide for identifying which foods are high or low in a nutrient. This allows you to choose foods wisely so that you eat enough of some nutrients while not eating too much of others.

The label does the math for you, putting all the numbers on the same scale of 0-100% DV for the day. These percentages are based on a 2,000-calorie daily diet, which is average for someone who is moderately active. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs. The % DV column does not add up vertically to 100%.

Limit These Nutrients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>% DV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat</td>
<td>12g</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Fat</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
<td>30mg</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
<td>470mg</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: In the daily diet, this food contributes 18% DV of Total Fat, 15% DV of saturated fat, 10% DV of cholesterol, and 20% DV of sodium. In addition, it contains three grams of trans fat, for which a % DV can’t be calculated.

You don’t need to memorize definitions for nutrient claims, such as "reduced fat," "light," "nonfat," and "low-fat." Just compare the % DV for Total Fat to see which food product is lower or higher.
Few foods contain 100 percent of the Daily Value for any nutrient. To determine how your total daily diet measures up to the recommended amount, add the % DVs for the individual nutrients from different food choices.

Quick Guide to % DV makes it easy to choose foods. It tells you that 5% DV or less of a nutrient is low, and 20% DV or more is high. For all nutrients that you want to limit (e.g., total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium), choose foods often that contain 5% DV or less of these nutrients. On the other hand, select foods with 20% DV or more of nutrients that you want to consume in larger amounts (e.g., fiber and calcium).

Compare labels to choose a diet lower in fats, as well as dietary cholesterol. In the examples below, the fat and cholesterol contents of butter, stick margarine, and tub margarine are obvious by reading the amount per serving on the Nutrition Facts label.

### Compare Spreads!*  
**Keep an eye on Saturated Fat, Trans Fat and Cholesterol!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrition Facts</th>
<th>Nutrition Facts</th>
<th>Nutrition Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Butter</strong> <strong>Margarine, stick †</strong></td>
<td><strong>Margarine, tub †</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serving Size 1 Tbsp (14g)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Serving Size 1 Tbsp (14g)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Serving Size 1 Tbsp (14g)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount Per Serving</strong></td>
<td><strong>Amount Per Serving</strong></td>
<td><strong>Amount Per Serving</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories</td>
<td>100 Calories from Fat 100</td>
<td>Calories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories from Fat</td>
<td>% Daily Value*</td>
<td>Calories from Fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat</td>
<td>11g</td>
<td>Total Fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat</td>
<td>7g</td>
<td>Saturated Fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Fat</td>
<td>0g</td>
<td>Trans Fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
<td>30mg</td>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol: 10 % DV</td>
<td>Cholesterol: 0 % DV</td>
<td>Cholesterol: 0 % DV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Nutrient values rounded based on FDA’s nutrition labeling regulations. Calorie and cholesterol content estimated.  
**Butter values from FDA Table of Trans Values, 1/30/95.  
† Values derived from 2002 USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 15. If the trans fat content is less than 0.5 g per serving, then the amount is listed as 0 g.

For the healthiest margarine:
- Choose soft or liquid margarines over stick forms of margarines.
- Make sure the first ingredient is liquid vegetable oil.
- Select margarines with 0 grams of trans fat and no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon.
- Avoid hydrogenated fats with more than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon.
- When comparing food labels, combine the grams (g) of saturated fat and trans fat, then choose the food with the lower combined amount. Look for the lowest % Daily Value for cholesterol, also.

**Ingredients List:** When a food is made with more than one ingredient, an ingredients list is required on the label. Ingredients are listed in order by weight, with the greatest amount listed first and the least amount last.

Limit these sources of unhealthy fat and cholesterol in the list of ingredients: animal fat (beef, ham, pork, bacon, lamb, chicken, turkey), lard, hardened fat or oil, egg and egg-yolk solids, cream, butter, whole-milk solids, palm oil, palm kernel oil, hydrogenated vegetable oil, vegetable shortening, coconut, coconut oil, and cocoa butter.
**Nutrient & Health Claims:** In addition to the "Nutrition Facts" label on the side or back of the package, check the health and nutrient claims on the front of the product. These claims, which provide optional information, tell you that the food contains desirable levels of the stated nutrients.

**Nutrient Claims:** "Low in saturated fat" and "no cholesterol" are two examples of nutrient claims.

**Health Claims:** A food with a health claim is a smart choice, because the food must meet strict standards to display the FDA approved claim.

Health claims link food or food components with a lowered risk for some chronic diseases. For example, a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

Health claims also state that the risk of coronary heart disease depends on many factors, including heredity, physical activity and smoking.

**Limit Fats & Cholesterol**
Fats supply energy, transport nutrients, insulate the body and are part of many body cells. Fat in the American diet generally comes from fats and oils, salad dressings, candy, gravies and sauces.

Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated. People often consume too much total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, and dietary cholesterol.

Health experts recommend that you keep your intake of unhealthy fats and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet. This is especially important to people concerned about obesity, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers.

The *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends the following intakes of fat and cholesterol every day:

- **total fat**—20 to 35% of calories, depending on age (65 grams for the 2,000-calorie intake level used in the Daily Value)*
- **saturated fat**—less than 10% of calories**
- **trans fat**—1% or less of total calories (20 grams for a 2,000-calorie diet.)
- **cholesterol**—less than 300 milligrams a day.

This remains the same, whatever a person’s daily calorie intake.

* Total fat includes unhealthy saturated and trans fat, as well as healthy polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat. Limit your total fat intake to 100% DV or less per day.

**In June 2006 the American Heart Association recommended that saturated fat intake be 7% or less of total calories.**

Fat has more than twice the calories per gram of carbohydrate or protein. Pay attention to the total amount of calories you consume in order to maintain a healthy weight.

**More on Trans Fat**
Scientific reports have confirmed the relationship between trans fat (and saturated fat) and an increased risk of coronary heart disease, because it raises blood LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels. Since January 1, 2006 all Nutrition Facts labels are required to include information on trans fat.

Since FDA has been unable to establish a Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) for trans fat, a % DV cannot be calculated. Therefore, only the gram (g) amount of trans fat is listed. If the content is less than 0.5g per serving, then the amount is listed as 0 g.

**Trying to Lose Weight?**
Fat provides over twice the calories per gram than protein and carbohydrate. To become aware of the fat content of the foods you eat, it is helpful to keep track of fat grams. By moderating your intake of fat, you will usually cut back on calories, also.

Be aware that the word "low-fat" on the label doesn’t automatically mean that a food is "low-calorie." "Low-fat" and "fat-free" foods, such as muffins and desserts, often contain more sugars and as many calories as the regular versions.

You don’t have to eat all low-calorie and low-fat foods. If you eat a high-calorie food, then balance it by eating several low-calorie foods throughout the day. Your body weight is determined by the total calories you consume and burn through physical activity, not by the total fat grams you consume.
Here are a few ways to eat smarter without counting fat grams or calories:

- eat fewer high-fat, sugary snacks
- eat fewer higher-calorie foods
- choose mostly lean and low-fat foods
- enjoy more fruits and vegetables
- eat smaller portions

For more information on fats and cholesterol request: HGIC 4050, Fat in Your Diet and HGIC 4051, Cholesterol.

For more information on food labeling request:
HGIC 4056, Reading the New Food Labels; HGIC 4057, Determining Nutritional Value of Foods; HGIC 4059, Food Labels: Carbohydrates; HGIC 4060, Serving Sizes for Special Diets; HGIC 4061, Nutrient Claims on Food Labels; and HGIC 4062, Nutrient Density.

Sources:

This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by J. G. Hunter, HGIC Information Specialist, and K. L. Cason, Professor, State EFNEP Coordinator, Clemson University. (New 11/06.)

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