

How to use food labels to understand what's in your food

Do you sometimes feel confused about which food product to choose at the grocery store? You're not alone. The number of choices available can be overwhelming—think about the many types of cereal bars there are on a grocery shelf. But a little label-reading know-how can help you better understand what's in your food, compare products and make informed choices.

Use the new magnifying glass symbol on the front of many food packages. It tells you at a glance if the food is high in one or more of saturated fat, sugars, sodium or any combination of these nutrients. These are nutrients to limit because consuming too much increases the risk of some chronic diseases, like heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

Use the nutrition facts table for more detailed nutrition information. Located on the back or side of food packaging, this table lists key nutrients, including saturated fat, sugars and sodium, and tells you how much of these nutrients there is in a stated serving of the food. The amounts are listed in grams or milligrams, and in per cent daily values, which you can use to compare foods. Follow this rule of thumb: five per cent or less of a nutrient is a little, 15 per cent or more is a lot.

Use the list of ingredients to learn what your food is made of. It tells you what ingredients make up the food, listed in descending order of weight. Here's a useful tip: all the added sugars in a food item are grouped together after the word "Sugars." This grouping helps you see if sugars were added and what their source is.

Together, these labelling tools can help you compare foods and make a more informed purchasing decision.

Learn more about using labels at canada.ca/nutrition-labelling.

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