

Reading Food Labels

What's Ahead in This Booklet

- Nutrition facts table
- Ingredient list
- Nutrition claims
- Supplemented foods
- Front of package nutrition symbol
- Commonly asked questions

Key Messages

1. Use the nutrition facts table, ingredient list, nutrient claims, health claims, and front of package nutrition symbol to make informed food choices.
2. Nutrition facts are based on a specific amount of food. Compare the specific amount on the label to the amount you usually eat.
3. Use the % daily value (% DV) to see how much of a specific nutrient a food has. Generally, 5% DV or less is a little, and 15% DV or more is a lot.
4. Ingredients are listed by weight, from the most to the least.

Words matter:

You will notice throughout the Food Mentoring Toolkit that food neutral language is used. If you would like to learn more about this topic, here is a link to [Food Neutrality](#).

Supporting Materials

Facilitator's Guide

If you are interested in speaking to clients about this topic, please email publichealthnutrition@saskhealthauthority.ca to request a facilitator guide. The guide includes a step-by-step plan for watching the video as a group and working through group activities and discussions.

If you would like to watch a video on this topic, visit the Label Reading section on the [Food Mentoring Toolkit home page](#). For more information, there are additional resources listed at the end of this booklet.

Reading Food Labels

Packaged foods contain the nutrition facts table and a list of ingredients. Nutrient claims and health claims may also be found on the food package, but they are not mandatory. As of January 2026, new front-of-package nutrition symbols are required for prepackaged foods that are high in saturated fat, sugars, and/or sodium. All this information can be used to help make more informed food choices.^{1, 2}

Nutrition facts table

Most packaged foods must have a nutrition facts table.

The table includes:^{1, 3}

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 bowl (300 g) / Pour 1 bol (300 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Teneur	% valeur quotidienne
Calories / Calories	440
Fat / Lipides	19 g 29 %

- Serving Size - the amount of food the nutrient information is based (e.g., ½ cup, 8 crackers, 250mL).
- Calories per serving.
- 12 core nutrients per serving – expressed in units such as grams (g) or milligrams (mg).
 - fat, saturated fat, trans fat, carbohydrate, fibre, sugars, protein, cholesterol, sodium, potassium, calcium, and iron.
- Percent daily values (% DVs) - shows if a food has a little or a lot of a certain nutrient.

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 12 crackers (30 g) pour 12 craquelins (30 g)	
Calories 107	% Daily Value*
	% valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 1 g	1 %
Saturated / saturés 0 g + Trans / trans 0 g	0 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 27 g	
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4 %
Sugars / Sucres 3 g	3 %
Protein / Protéines 3 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	
Sodium 370 mg	16 %
Potassium 50 mg	1 %
Calcium 10 mg	1 %
Iron / Fer 2 mg	11 %
*5% or less is a little , 15% or more is a lot *5 % ou moins c'est peu , 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup	
Ingredients: Enriched wheat flour • Sugars (glucose, barley malt extract) • Salt • Vegetable oil • Soda	

Figure 1: © All rights reserved. Nutrition Labelling: Nutrition Facts Table, Health Canada. Reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health, 2024. URL: [Nutrition Labelling: Nutrition facts table - Canada.ca](https://www150.com/nutrition-facts-table)¹

Serving size^{1,3}

- Information on the nutrition facts table is based on a specific amount of food referred to as a serving size.
- Represents the amount of food usually consumed in one sitting, and it is based on a reference amount. Reference amounts serve as a basis to determine what is considered a single-serving of prepackaged foods.
- It is not a recommendation for how much food you should eat.

- Makes it easy to:
 - compare similar foods
 - know how many calories and nutrients you get from a prepackaged food
- Compare the serving size to your portion size or how much you usually eat. If you consume more or less than the serving size, then the amount of each nutrient you consume will be different than what is shown in the table.
For example: if the serving size for a beverage is 250mL but you drink 500mL of the product, then you would double the amount listed for each nutrient.

Percent daily value (% DV) ^{1,3}

- The % DV shows the percentage of nutrients in a single serving that contributes to the total daily intake of that nutrient. For example, if the %DV for protein in a product is 10%, and you ate one serving of the product, you would have met 10% of your daily protein needs in that serving.
- The %DV column does not add to 100%, and the information is based on a diet of 2,000 calories per day, and you may need more or less of 2,000 calories per day.
- It shows whether a food has **a little** or **a lot** of a certain nutrient.

5% DV or less is a **LITTLE**
15% DV or more is a **LOT**

- If the package is too small to fit, the information should be available via the company contact number or webpage.
- Manufacturers may choose to list other nutrients such as unsaturated fats and other vitamins or minerals.

Use the nutrition facts table to: ^{1,3}

- Compare similar foods to determine which is a more nutritious choice:
 - More nutritious options tend to have higher levels of iron, fibre, calcium, or potassium.
 - Less nutritious options tend to have higher levels of sodium, sugar, and saturated fats.
- Select foods for special diets (e.g., if you have diabetes, you can use the nutrition facts table to look at the amount of carbohydrates a product has).

Exemptions from a nutrition facts table ^{1,4}

Foods always exempt from carrying a Nutrition Facts table:

- Fresh vegetables and fruits, without added ingredients
- Prepackaged individual food portions that are solely intended to be served with meals and snacks, such as crackers served with soup
- Milk sold in refillable glass container

Foods usually exempt from carrying a Nutrition Facts table:

- Herbs and spices
- Beverage with an alcohol content of more than 0.5%
- Very small packages, such as one-bite candies
- Raw, single-ingredient meat, poultry, fish and seafood

- Food sold by small-batch producers, like a farmer’s market
- Food sold only in grocery stores where the product is prepared or packaged in-store
- Individual portions for immediate consumption, such as sandwich sold in plastic wrap

List of ingredients ^{1,5}

- Is a list of all ingredients in the food product, listed in order of weight. The first ingredient is the one that weighs the most, and the last one is the one that weighs the least. This means a food contains **more** of the ingredients found at the beginning of the list and **less** of the ingredients at the end of the list.
- All sources of sugar are grouped together in brackets after the term “sugars”, and they are listed in descending order of weight.
- Food allergens must be declared in the list of ingredients or in “contains statement”.
- Some ingredients can appear at the end of the list in any order, and those include: added flavours, food additives, seasonings (except for salt), added vitamins and minerals, and flavour enhancers (e.g., monosodium glutamate).

Example of a list of ingredients:



Figure 2: © All rights reserved. Nutrition Labelling: List of Ingredients, Health Canada. Reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health, 2024. URL: [Nutrition labelling: List of ingredients - Canada.ca](https://www150.comma.ca/nutrition-labeling/list-of-ingredients) ²

Use the list of ingredients to: ^{1,5}

- determine if a product contains a certain ingredient
- identify which ingredients are most present in the product
- avoid a food product in the case of a food allergy or intolerance

For more information refer to the [Canada's Food Guide](#) section of the Food Mentoring Toolkit.

Front of package symbol ^{2,6}

As of January 2026, prepackaged foods are required to include front-of-package symbols for foods that meet or exceed specific levels for sugars, sodium and saturated fats.

Frequently eating foods high in sugar, sodium, and saturated fats can lead to an increased risk of:

- stroke
- heart disease
- type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure
- some types of cancer

Front-of-package nutrition symbols:

- Help people make quick and informed choices when grocery shopping.
- Support educators who are teaching about how to identify foods high in nutrients that can negatively affect health.

What to look for:

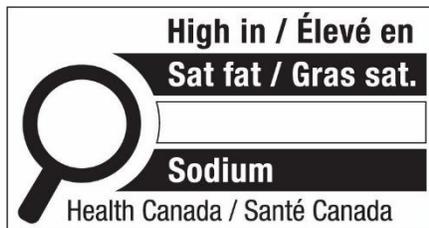
- Black and white magnifying glass that highlights if a food is high in saturated fat, sugars, or sodium, or any combination of these. Symbol size varies depending on the size of the food package.

For more information on front-of-package labelling visit [Nutrition labelling: Front-of-package nutrition symbol - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/nutrition/labelling-front-of-package-nutrition-symbol)

Example⁶

1. Product high in **saturated fat** and **sodium**:

horizontal

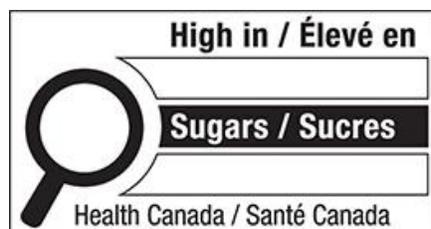


vertical



2. Product high in **sugars**:

horizontal



vertical

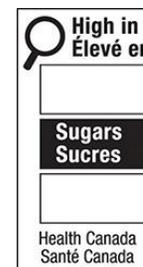


Figure 3: © All rights reserved. Nutrition Labelling: Front-of-package nutrition symbol, Health Canada. Reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health, 2024. URL: [Nutrition labelling: Front-of-package nutrition symbol - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/nutrition/labelling-front-of-package-nutrition-symbol)³

Supplemented foods ^{7,8}

Supplemented foods are prepackaged foods that contain one or more added supplemented ingredients and have a distinct set of regulatory requirements.

Some examples of permitted supplemental ingredients include caffeine, minerals, vitamins, and amino acids, such as:

- beverages or bars with added vitamins and minerals
- beverages with added caffeine (i.e., caffeine is added and marketed as energy booster)

Some may require a limit for consumption, may not be suitable for some individuals, and may not be suitable to be consumed with other supplemented foods or supplements with the same ingredients. The label contains various types of information (explained below) about the safety of consumption.

Supplemented food caution identifier ^{7,8}

The caution identifier is displayed on the front of the label, and it means that there is a caution box on the back or side of the label with cautionary statements on how to eat or drink the food appropriately. Some supplemented foods contain supplemental ingredients that can pose a risk to health if:

- consumed in excess by the general population;
- consumed by those who are pregnant, children, or other vulnerable groups.

Look for the exclamation mark on the front of the package, and then find the cautionary statement to help decide if the food is right for you.



Figure 4: © All rights reserved. *Supplemented Foods: Labels*. Health Canada, date modified: 2024-08-26. Adapted and reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health. 2026. Available at: [Supplemented foods: Labels - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/supplemented-foods-labels.html) ⁴

Caution box with cautionary statements ^{7,8}

Supplemented foods that can pose a risk to health must carry a caution box on the back or side of the label.

The caution box could tell you:

- who should not eat or drink this product
- to limit the number of servings per day
- to not eat or drink it with other supplemented foods or supplements with the same supplemented ingredients

Ensure that participants are aware that you are offering a supplemented food, so they can decide if it is safe for them to consume.

Look for the word “**caution**” near the supplemented foods facts table and read the statements in the caution box to help decide if the food is right for consumption.

Caution: Not recommended for those under 14 years old, pregnant or breast-feeding women or individuals sensitive to caffeine • Do not drink more than 1 serving per day • Do not drink on the same day as any other supplemented foods or supplements with the same supplemental ingredients.

Attention : Déconseillé aux individus de moins de 14 ans, aux femmes enceintes ou qui allaitent ou aux personnes sensibles à la caféine • Ne pas boire plus de 1 portion par jour • Ne pas boire le même jour que d'autres aliments supplémentés ou suppléments contenant les mêmes ingrédients supplémentaires.

Figure 5: © All rights reserved. *Supplemented Foods: Labels*. Health Canada, date modified: 2024-08-26. Adapted and reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health. 2026. Available at: [Supplemented foods: Labels - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/supplemented-foods-labels.html)⁴

Supplemented Food Facts table^{7,8}

Supplemented foods have specific label requirements, and they must have a supplemented food facts table. The table contains:

- The unique heading “Supplemented Food Facts”
- The same requirements as the nutrition facts table for [core nutrients](#)
- The section “Supplemented with” at the bottom, that lists the total amount of each supplemental ingredient.

Nutrition Facts Valeur nutritive	different table heading	Supplemented Food Facts Info-aliment supplémenté
Per 1 cup (250 mL) pour 1 tasse (250 mL)		Per 1 can (473 mL) pour 1 canette (473 mL)
Calories 110 % Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*		Calories 160 % Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 0 g 0 %	same core nutrients	Fat / Lipides 0 g 0 %
Saturated / saturés 0 g + Trans / trans 0 g 0 %		Saturated / saturés 0 g + Trans / trans 0 g 0 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 26 g		Carbohydrate / Glucides 41 g
Fibre / Fibres 0 g 0 %		Fibre / Fibres 0 g 0 %
Sugars / Sucres 22 g 22 %		Sugars / Sucres 41 g 41 %
Protein / Protéines 2 g		Protein / Protéines 0 g
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg		Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg
Sodium 0 mg 0 %		Sodium 150 mg 7 %
Potassium 450 mg 10 %		Potassium 60 mg 1 %
Calcium 30 mg 2 %		Calcium 125 mg 10 %
Iron / Fer 0 mg 0 %		Iron / Fer 0 mg 0 %
*5% or less is a little , 15% or more is a lot *5 % ou moins c'est peu , 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup	same % daily value footnote	*5% or less is a little , 15% or more is a lot *5 % ou moins c'est peu , 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup
		Supplemented with / Supplémenté en[†]
		Niacin / Niacine 7 mg 44 %
		Pantothenate / Pantothénate 8 mg 160 %
		Vitamin B ₆ / Vitamine B ₆ 1 mg 59 %
		Vitamin B ₁₂ / Vitamine B ₁₂ 4 µg 167 %
		Vitamin C / Vitamine C 225 mg 250 %
		Vitamin E / Vitamine E 2 mg 13 %
		Magnesium / Magnésium 20 mg 5 %
		Caffeine / Caféine 170 mg
		[†] Includes naturally occurring and supplemental amounts [†] Comprend les quantités naturelles et supplémentées

new section on the supplemental ingredients

new footnote related to the supplemental ingredients

Figure 6: © All rights reserved. *Supplemented Foods: Labels*. Health Canada, date modified: 2024-08-26. Adapted and reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health. 2026. Available at: [Supplemented foods: Labels - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/supplemented-foods-labels.html)⁴

Some nutrients will not have a % DV in the Supplemented Foods Facts table, because they are not daily required nutrients.

For more information about Supplemented Foods Facts Table, visit: [Supplemented foods: Labels - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/supplemented-foods-labels.html)⁹

Supplemented Foods: Caffeinated energy drinks ⁷

All caffeinated energy drinks must have displayed on the label:

- the statement *"high caffeine content"*
- a supplemented food caution identifier
- the cautionary statements:
 - *"Not recommended for those under 14 years old, pregnant or breastfeeding women or individuals sensitive to caffeine"*
 - *"Do not drink more than X serving(s) per day"*



Figure 7: © All rights reserved. Supplemented Foods: Labels. Health Canada, date modified: 2024-08-26. Adapted and reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health. 2026. Available at: [Supplemented foods: Labels - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/supplemented-foods-labels.html) ⁴

You should not consume caffeinated energy drinks if you are:

- a child
- pregnant or breastfeeding
- an individual sensitive to caffeine

For other groups, prior to consume caffeinated energy drinks, read the label to know:

- how much caffeine is in the container
- the maximum number of servings you could consume

Nutrition claims^{9,10}

- Nutrition claims are optional statements about a specific feature of a food such as “good source of Vitamin C”.
- Foods must meet certain criteria in order to include a nutrition claim.
- Two types of nutrition claims:
 - **Nutrient Content Claims:**
 - describe the amount of a nutrient in a food. You may see statements like “*low in sugar*”, “*reduced in sodium*”, and “*source of fibre*”.

- **Health Claims:**

- describe the potential health effects of a food product when consumed as part of a healthy diet. E.g., *"Consuming fibre from coarse wheat bran promotes regularity."*, *"Vitamin D helps build strong bones and teeth."*

Explore More

Does a nutrition claim identify healthier foods?

Nutrient content claims and health claims are optional and only focus on specific features of a food. It is important not to rely on these claims alone when making food choices, as they do not guarantee a food product is the better choice. For example, a product may say "fat-free" or "made from whole grains" but it could still contain a lot of added sugar.

Always compare the Nutrition Facts Table of similar products to determine the better choice.

Example of nutrient content claims:

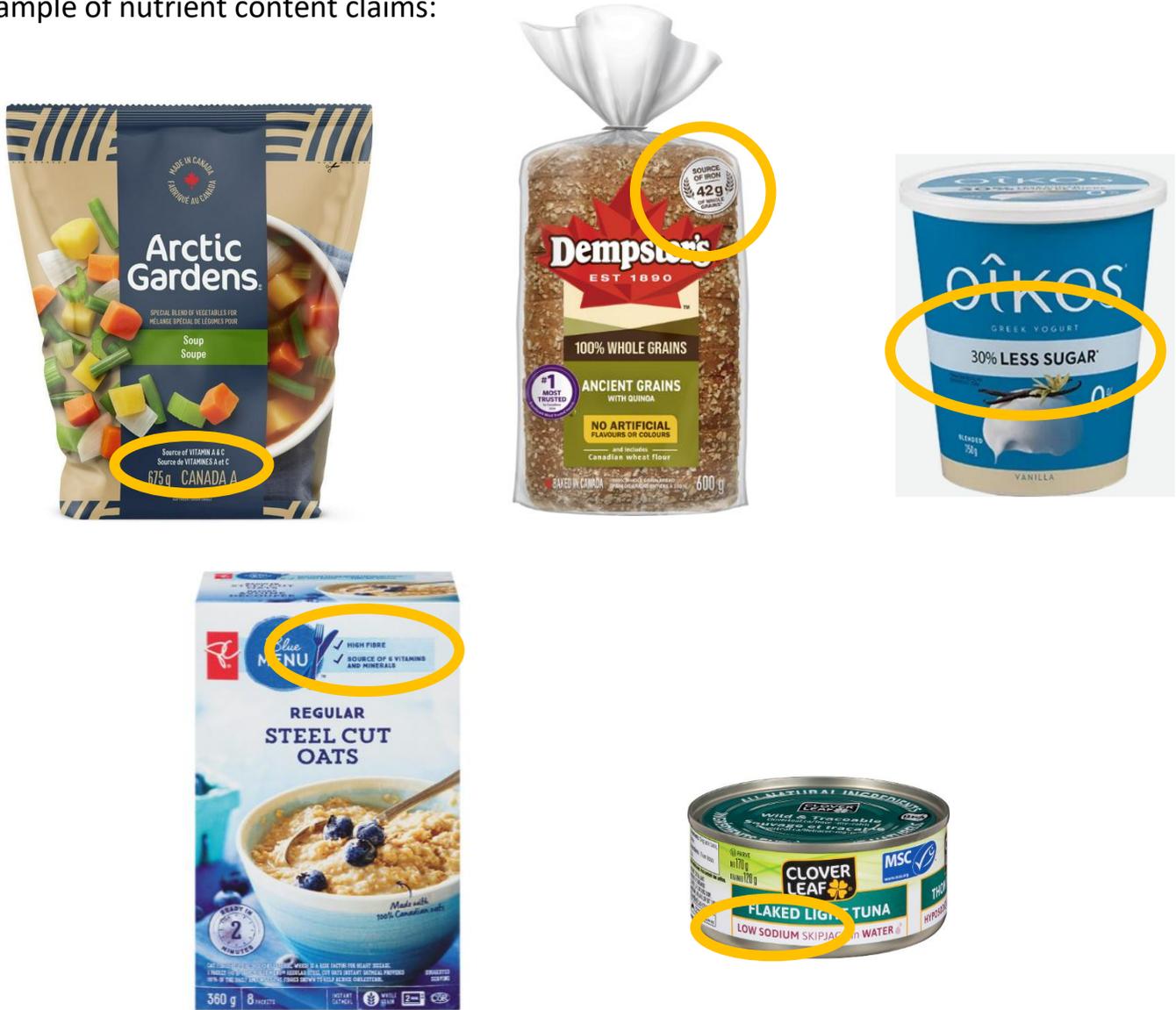


Figure 8: Examples of nutrient content claims. ^{5,6,7,8,9}

For more information about nutrition claims and their meaning, visit: [Nutrition labelling: Nutrition claims - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/nutrition-labeling/nutrition-claims.html) ^{9,10}

For more information refer to the [Canada's Food Guide](#) section of the Food Mentoring Toolkit.

Commonly Asked Questions



1. What should I know about the three ingredients (sodium, sugar, and saturated fat) that are highlighted in the new front of packaged symbol?

Sodium: ^{11,12,13}

A small amount of sodium is needed to maintain health, however too much sodium can have negative impacts. For some people, too much sodium causes blood pressure to rise. High blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke. Too much sodium over a long period can also damage the kidneys.

The recommended amount of sodium for adults is:

- a minimum of 1500 mg per day and
- a maximum of 2300 mg per day

On average, adult Canadians consume about 3,400 mg (roughly 1 ½ teaspoon) of sodium per day. This is significantly more than the recommended amount.

- **One teaspoon of salt = 2300mg of sodium**

Most of the sodium Canadians eat (77%) comes from processed foods sold in grocery stores and in food service outlets (e.g. restaurants). Only about 5% to 11% is added at the table or when cooking at home food, with the remainder occurring naturally in foods. All types of salt are high in sodium (sea salt, kosher salt, pickling salt or a gourmet salt), and they all affect your health in the same way.

Explore More

All types of salt are high in sodium. Whether it is sea salt, kosher salt, pickling salt or a gourmet salt, they all have about the same amount of sodium as table salt. There is no difference in how they may affect your health.

Sugar: ^{13,14,15}

Health Canada recommends *free sugars* be **less than 10%** of total energy intake each day. For example: 10% of a 2000 calorie per day diet means that 200 calories, or less, should come from *free sugars* (200 calories from free sugar = 50g or 12.5 teaspoons).

Explore More

Free Sugars

Free sugars, include sugars that are added to foods and drinks, and sugars that are naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates. Free sugars do **not** include naturally occurring sugars found in vegetables, fruits, and unsweetened milk.

Free sugars like honey, maple syrup and agave may come from natural sources, but your body processes them in the same way as sugar.

Excess sugar in any form provides extra calories. Whether you choose to use honey, brown sugar, agave syrup or white sugar, use small amounts.

White table sugar and other sugars added to foods contribute extra calories to foods but no other nutrients. Eating foods with added sugars may lead to an increased risk of cavities, especially in children, excess calorie consumption and increased risk for chronic diseases.

To reduce the amount of free sugars in your diet:

- drink water in place of sugary drinks
- aim for most of your sugar intake to come from fruits, vegetables, and unsweetened dairy products

Saturated fats: ^{13,16,17}

Fats are important for our overall health, they provide energy and help the body grow, develop, and absorb some vitamins. However not all fats are the same. Some fats help keep the heart healthy, while others increase risk for heart disease and should be limited.

Saturated fat

A type of fat found in animal-based foods such as lard, shortening, high fat dairy products, fatty meats, and some tropical oils such as coconut and palm kernel oil. Diets high in saturated fat increase risk for heart disease.

To reduce intake of saturated fats:

- Look for foods that have 15% DV or less of saturated fat.
- Include plant-based protein foods more often.
- Remove skin and trim fat off meat before cooking.
- Choose leaner types and cuts such as bison, elk, moose, skinless poultry, extra-lean ground beef, tenderloin, and roasts.
- Bake, broil, or grill foods rather than frying them using butter or lard.

Did you know that there are other types of fat?

Unsaturated fats

A type of fat found mostly in plant-based foods and fish, that helps to improve blood cholesterol levels and reduce the risk for heart disease. There are two kinds:

- **Monounsaturated fat** - naturally found in olive and canola oil, non-hydrogenated margarines, avocados, and nuts like almonds, pistachios, pecans, and cashews.
- **Polyunsaturated fat** - include omega-3 and omega-6 fats:
 - **Omega-3 fats** are found in fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout, herring, and sardines. They are also found in flax seeds, oils, and some soft margarines. Omega-3 fats are also added to some eggs, dairy products, and juices.
 - **Omega-6 fats** are found in safflower, sunflower, and corn oils. They are also found in nuts and seeds such as almonds, pecans, Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds, and sesame seeds.

Limit the amount of saturated fats in your diet and replace foods that contain mostly saturated fat with foods that contain mostly unsaturated fat.

Trans fat

A type of fat found naturally in small amounts in animal-based foods such as dairy, beef, and lamb. Manufacturers, when processing some vegetable oils, can produce small amounts of unavoidable trans fats. Some prepackaged foods can contain small amounts of these trans fats.

In 2018, Health Canada banned the use of partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs), which is the main source of industrially produced trans fats. Manufacturers cannot purposely add them to any foods sold in Canada.

2. How do I use food labels to help me make informed health choices? ^{18,19}

When choosing a food product, compare the labels of similar products to help you identify nutritious and safe food options:

- a. First, identify the nutrition facts table and compare the serving sizes.
- b. Use the % DV to identify if a food product has a little or a lot of a certain nutrient and compare between products. Remember that 5% DV is a less or a little, and 15% DV is more or a lot.
- c. Read the ingredients list and compare the lists.
- d. Look for nutrition claims.
- e. Look for allergen labelling.
- f. Check the “best-before”, “packaged on”, and “expiration” dates.

When making your choice, look for food products that have less sugars, sodium, and saturated fats. Some nutrients you may want more of are iron, fibre, calcium, and potassium.

It is also important to remember that many nutrient dense foods do not have a nutrition facts table, such as fresh vegetables and fruits.

Additional Reading

1. [Food labels - Canada.ca](#) – Health Canada ²⁰
2. [Nutrition Labelling Online Course - Canada.ca](#) – Health Canada ²¹
3. [Understanding Food Labels in Canada - Unlock Food](#) – Unlock Food ²²

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