

NUTRITION LABEL CHEAT SHEET

In today's health-conscious era, consumers are increasingly mindful of their well-being. As a result, certain food producers resort to deceptive tactics to persuade individuals into purchasing heavily processed and unhealthy items. To distinguish between falsely labeled junk foods and genuinely nutritious options, it's crucial to learn how to interpret food labels effectively...

THE CLAIMS ON THE FRONT OF THE BOX

A valuable piece of advice is to completely disregard the claims found on the front of product packaging. These front labels are frequently employed as marketing strategies to entice people into purchasing items. Nevertheless, many of these claims are highly deceptive, designed to attract consumers by suggesting health benefits. Surprisingly, studies reveal that including health claims on front labels can lead individuals to perceive a product as healthier compared to the same product without such claims, significantly influencing consumer decisions. Manufacturers often employ these labels in a dishonest manner, employing misleading or even false health claims, such as 'Natural flavor,' 'Natural,' or 'Healthy.' As a result, it becomes challenging for consumers to make healthy choices without carefully examining the ingredients list...

THE INGREDIENTS LIST

The ingredients in a product are arranged based on their quantities, with the most abundant ingredient listed first. As a helpful guideline, it's recommended to focus on the first three ingredients, as they constitute the major portion of what you're consuming. If these initial ingredients consist of refined grains, sugary substances, or hydrogenated oils, it's a sign that the product is not healthy. Instead, opt for items where the first three ingredients are whole foods. Moreover, if the list of ingredients extends beyond two to three lines, it indicates that the product is highly processed. Prioritize products that have whole foods listed as the primary ingredients and be cautious of those with lengthy ingredient lists...

SERVING SIZES

Nutrition labels provide information about the number of calories and nutrients in a standard amount of the product, usually indicated as a suggested single serving. However, these serving sizes are frequently much smaller than what people typically eat in one sitting. For instance, one serving might be just half a can of soda, a quarter of a cookie, half a chocolate bar, or even a single biscuit. This tactic employed by manufacturers is an attempt to mislead consumers into believing that the food contains fewer calories and less sugar.

Unfortunately, many individuals are unaware of this serving size manipulation and assume that the entire package constitutes a single serving. In reality, it may contain two, three, or even more servings. If you want to accurately assess the nutritional value of what you're eating, you must multiply the given serving size on

the label by the number of servings you actually consumed. The serving sizes listed on packaging can be misleading and do not reflect the realistic amounts most people eat in one sitting...

MISLEADING CLAIMS

Packaged food items often feature health claims aimed at capturing your interest and persuading you that the product is beneficial for your well-being. Various marketing terms are linked to enhanced health, frequently utilized to deceive consumers into believing that unhealthy and processed foods are actually good for them. Here are some of the most common claims and what they mean:

>LIGHT: Light products are processed to reduce either calories or fat. Some products are simply watered down. Check carefully to see if anything has been added instead like sugar.

>MULTIGRAIN: This sounds very healthy but only means that a product contains more than one type of grain. These are most likely refined grains unless the product is marked as whole grain.

>NATURAL: This does not necessarily mean that the product resembles anything natural. It simply indicates that at one point the manufacturer worked with a natural source like apples or rice.

>ORGANIC: This label says very little about whether a product is healthy. For example, organic sugar is still sugar.

>NO ADDED SUGAR: Some products are naturally high in sugar. The fact that they don't have added sugar doesn't mean they're healthy. Unhealthy sugar substitutes may also have been added.

>LOW-CALORIE: Low-calorie products have to have one-third fewer calories than the brand's original product. Yet, one brand's low-calorie version may have similar calories as another brand's original.

>LOW-FAT: This label usually means that the fat has been reduced at the cost of adding more sugar. Be very careful and read the ingredients list.

>LOW-CARB: Recently, low-carb diets have been linked to improved health. Still, processed foods that are labeled low-carb are usually still processed junk foods, similar to processed low-fat foods.

>MADE WITH WHOLE GRAINS: The product may contain very little whole grains. Check the ingredients list if whole grains aren't in the first three ingredients, the amount is negligible.

>FORTIFIED OR ENRICHED: This means that some nutrients have been added to the product. For example, vitamin D is often added to milk. Yet, just because something is fortified doesn't make it healthy.

>GLUTEN-FREE: Gluten-free doesn't mean healthy. The product simply doesn't contain wheat, spelt, rye, or barley. Many gluten-free foods are highly processed and loaded with unhealthy fats and sugar.

>FRUIT-FLAVORED: Many processed foods have a name that refers to a natural flavor, such as strawberry yogurt. However, the product may not contain any fruit only chemicals designed to taste like fruit.

>ZERO TRANS FAT: This phrase means "less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving." Thus, if serving sizes are misleadingly small, the product may still contain trans fat.

Even with these warnings, there are indeed genuinely healthy foods that are organic, whole grain, or natural. However, it's essential to remember that just because a label makes specific claims, it doesn't automatically mean the product is healthy...

DIFFERENT NAMES FOR SUGAR

Sugar is known by numerous names, some of which may not be familiar to you. Food manufacturers take advantage of this fact by intentionally incorporating various types of sugar into their products, making it challenging to discern the actual amount. By doing so, they can place a seemingly healthier ingredient at the top of the list, while mentioning sugar further down. As a result, even if a product contains a significant amount of sugar, it may not be listed among the first three ingredients. To prevent inadvertently consuming excessive sugar, be vigilant about recognizing the following sugar names in ingredient lists:

>Types of sugar: beet sugar, brown sugar, buttered sugar, cane sugar, caster sugar, coconut sugar, date sugar, golden sugar, invert sugar, muscovado sugar, organic raw sugar, raspadura sugar, evaporated cane juice, and confectioners sugar.

>Types of syrup: carob syrup, golden syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, agave nectar, malt syrup, maple syrup, oat syrup, rice bran syrup, and rice syrup.

>Other added sugars: barley malt, molasses, cane juice crystals, lactose, corn sweetener, crystalline fructose, dextran, malt powder, ethyl maltol, fructose, fruit juice concentrate, galactose, glucose, disaccharides, maltodextrin, and maltose.

Sugar goes by various other names many of which you may not recognize. These include cane sugar, invert sugar, corn sweetener, dextran, molasses, malt syrup, maltose, and evaporated cane juice.

ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

Artificial sweeteners can have adverse effects on health. You might wonder what sugar substitutes are. Various types of sweeteners are utilized to replace table sugar, and these include:

SUGAR ALCOHOLS

Some sugar substitutes, such as xylitol, mannitol and sorbitol, are made from fruits

and berries.

Sugar alcohols are a type of carbohydrates and have a chemical structure that is similar to sugar...

SYNTHETIC SWEETENERS:

Artificial sweeteners are manufactured alternatives to cane sugar, serving as substitutes for sucrose. These sugar substitutes are widely available in the form of powders or liquid drops. Additionally, there are granulated versions suitable for cooking and baking, and some substitutes are even incorporated into processed products...

>STEVIA: a plant-based sweetener available under various brand names, including Splenda Naturals Stevia Sweetener and Truvia.

>ASPARTAME: a synthetic sweetener sold under the brand name Equal.

>SUCRALOSE: a synthetic sweetener sold under the brand name Splenda.

>SACCHARIN: a synthetic sweetener sold under the brand names Sweet'N Low, Sugar Twin and Necta Sweet.

>ACESULFAME K: a synthetic sweetener sold under the brand name Sunett.

Artificial sweeteners may also be listed on food ingredient labels as:

- >Calcium cyclamate
- >Cyclamate
- >Cyclamates
- >Phenylalanine
- >Saccharin
- >Saccharine
- >Sodium cyclamate
- >Sucralose
- >Sugar substitute
- >Sweet substance
- >Sweetener
- >Sweetening agent

Consuming too much artificial sweetener can increase the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, eye disease, kidney disease and may also include effects like weight gain, poor blood sugar control, and an unhealthy gut...

IN CONCLUSION:

By arming ourselves with the knowledge to interpret food labels effectively, we can empower ourselves to make healthier choices. Being aware of deceptive tactics used by certain food producers allows us to see through misleading claims and focus on products that truly align with our health goals. In a world where marketing strategies can sometimes cloud our judgment, being conscious consumers enables us to take charge of our well-being and make informed decisions about the foods we consume. So, let's navigate the grocery aisles with confidence, embracing truly

nutritious options and leaving behind the allure of mislabeled junk foods. Our health and vitality are worth the effort, and together, we can foster a culture of informed eating that benefits us all...