

Nutrition Facts Label: Proposed Changes Aim to Better Inform Food Choices

A lot has changed in the American diet since the Nutrition Facts label was introduced in 1993 to provide important nutritional information on food packages.

People are eating larger serving sizes. Rates of obesity, heart disease and stroke remain high. More is known about the relationship between nutrients and the risk of chronic diseases.

So the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposes bringing this familiar rectangular box—which has become one of the most recognized graphics in the world—up to date with changes to its design and content.

“Obesity, heart disease and other chronic diseases are leading public health problems,” says Michael Landa, director of FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. “The proposed new label is intended to bring attention to calories and serving sizes, which are important in addressing these problems. Further, we are now proposing to require the listing of added sugars. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends reducing calories from added sugars and solid fats.”

Jessica Leighton, Ph.D., senior nutrition science and policy advisor in FDA’s Office of Foods and Veteri-

Current Label

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 2/3 cup (55g)			
Servings Per Container About 8			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 230		Calories from Fat 40	
		% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g			12%
Saturated Fat 1g			5%
Trans Fat 0g			
Cholesterol 0mg			0%
Sodium 160mg			7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g			12%
Dietary Fiber 4g			16%
Sugars 1g			
Protein 3g			
Vitamin A			10%
Vitamin C			8%
Calcium			20%
Iron			45%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily value may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Proposed Label

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per 2/3 cup	
Calories	230
% DV*	
12%	Total Fat 8g
5%	Saturated Fat 1g
	Trans Fat 0g
0%	Cholesterol 0mg
7%	Sodium 160mg
12%	Total Carbs 37g
14%	Dietary Fiber 4g
	Sugars 1g
	Added Sugars 0g
	Protein 3g
10%	Vitamin D 2mcg
20%	Calcium 260mg
45%	Iron 8mg
5%	Potassium 235mg
* Footnote on Daily Values (DV) and calories reference to be inserted here.	

The proposed Nutrition Facts label (above right) will emphasize the number of calories and servings per container; update % Daily Values for nutrients such as fiber and calcium; update serving sizes; list the amount of added sugars; require listing of potassium and vitamin D if present, and no longer require the labeling of Vitamins A and C.

“It’s all about providing information that people can use to make their own choices.”

nary Medicine, and Claudine Kavanaugh, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D., a health scientist at FDA, explain what you can expect to see if the proposed changes are enacted.

“The goal is to make people aware of what they are eating and give them the tools to make healthy dietary choices throughout the day,” says Leighton.

What’s Different? And Why?

- The first thing consumers would notice is a greater emphasis – with larger and bolder type – on calories. “The number of calories is especially important to maintaining a healthy weight,” says Leighton.
- For the first time, “Added Sugars” would be included on the label. On average, Americans eat 16 percent of their daily calories from sugars added during food production.
- And the calories from fat would no longer be listed. “We know that the type of fat is more important than the total amount of fat,” says Kavanaugh. Total, saturated and *trans* fat will still be required.
- The number of servings per package would also be more prominent. And “Amount Per Serving,” would now have the actual serving size listed, such as “Amount per cup.”
- FDA proposes updating serving size requirements. These updates would reflect the reality of what people actually eat, according to recent food consumption data. By law, serving sizes must be based on what people actually eat, not on what they “should” be eating.

- FDA would update Daily Values for various nutrients. Daily Values are used to calculate the Percent Daily Value (%DV) on the label, which helps consumers understand the nutrition information in the context of a total diet. In addition, the %DV would be shifted to the left of the label. FDA wants to help consumers visually and quickly put nutrient information in context.
- The amounts of potassium and Vitamin D would be required on the label. Vitamin D is important for healthy bones, especially among women and the elderly. And potassium helps to lower blood pressure and prevent hypertension. “We have evidence that people are not consuming enough of these nutrients to protect against chronic diseases,” says Leighton.

What’s the Goal?

Both Leighton and Kavanaugh stress that the primary goal of the proposed changes to the Nutrition Facts label is not to tell people what they should be eating, but to expand and highlight the information they most need when making food choices. “It’s all about providing information that people can use to make their own choices,” Kavanaugh says.

For people with certain health issues, the information can be particularly valuable. “Although the label is made for the general population, many of us are at risk for cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and stroke or simply want to eat fewer

calories,” Kavanaugh says.

- If you are concerned about high blood pressure and strokes, you may want to pay attention to sodium and potassium amounts on food labels.
- For cardiovascular health, seek foods lower in saturated fats, cholesterol, trans fats and sodium.

Public comment sought

FDA is dividing the proposed Nutrition Facts label changes into two proposed rules, one that would update the nutrition information based on nutrition science and the label design to help highlight important information. The second covers the changes to serving size requirements and labeling for certain package sizes.

Both are published in the Federal Register for a 90-day comment period; to read them and comment, visit FDA’s official docket at www.regulations.gov.

FDA proposes that the food industry be given two years to comply after publication of any final rules governing the Nutrition Facts label.

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