

When the food labels says "free" it may not necessarily mean "free"

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Foods labeled as fat free or sugar free might not be totally "free" depending on the portion you normally eat. In other words, if you want to keep off unwanted pounds, it's smart to be a label reader.

"The manufacturer can label a food fat free or [sugar](#) free if it has less than one-half gram per serving," said Karen Brewton, R.D., L.D., with The Methodist Hospital in Houston. "It can meet the criteria for "free" as the portion listed on the label, but if your portion is much larger, you may be consuming significant amounts of fat or sugar and therefore more [calories](#). "

Manufacturers set the serving size for the package, so it's important to not only look at the serving size, but also the number of servings in the package. If you eat the entire package, you will need to multiply the numbers on the label by the number of servings in the package. For example, chips and snacks offered at the check-out lane in the grocery or at the gas station appear to be one serving but often contain 2 or 3 servings per package.

"Sugar free" is another designation to watch out for, especially for people with diabetes. Brewton says sugar is a carbohydrate and foods such as sugar-free cookies or candy are not free of carbohydrates. A person with [diabetes](#) may be unintentionally consuming large amounts of carbohydrates that can raise their [blood glucose level](#).

"If reading labels is not for you, you can always head to the produce

department where there are foods that are extremely healthy for you and they have no labels," Brewton said.

Provided by Methodist Hospital System

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