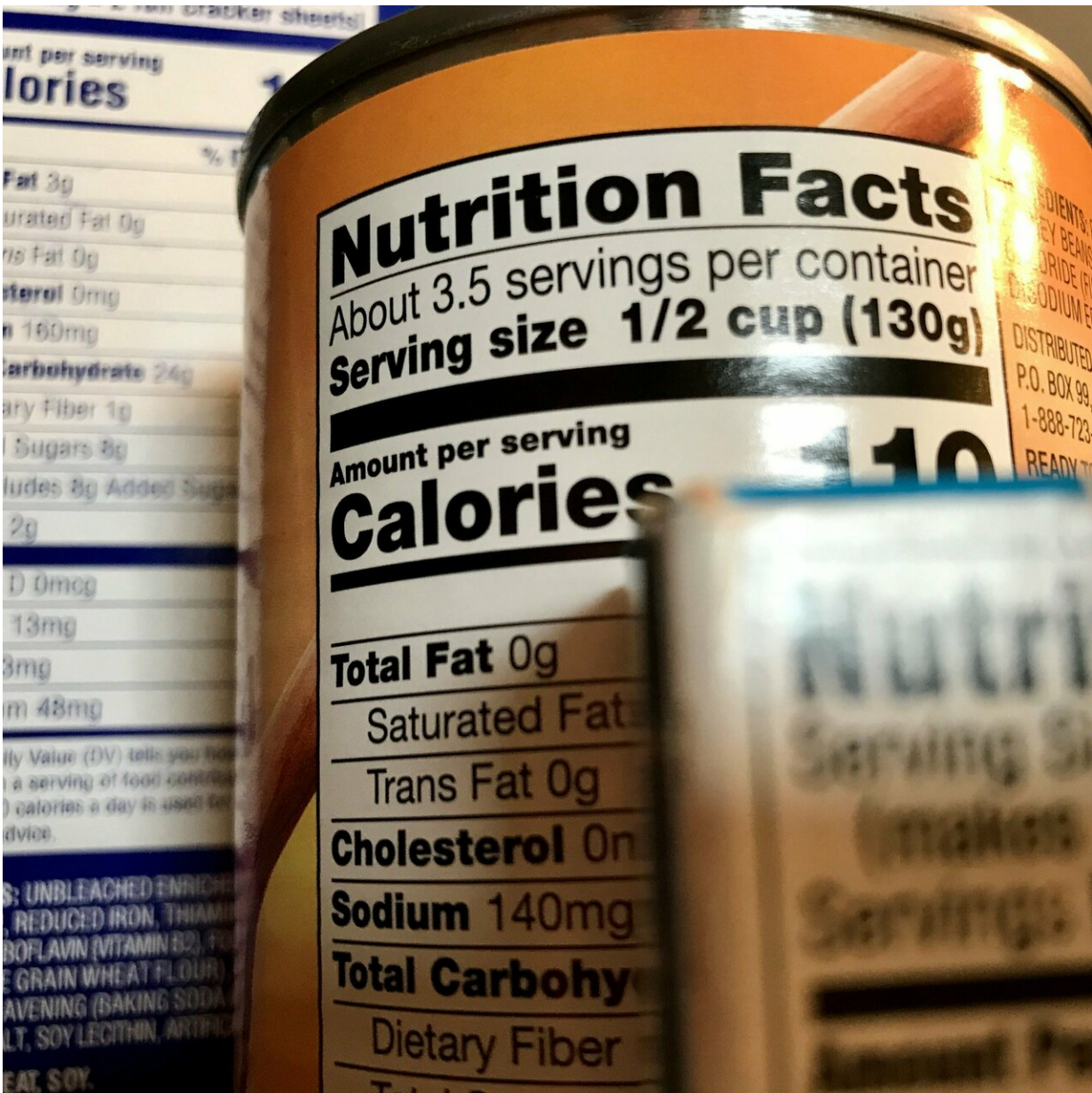


Is label literacy a key to healthier food choices?

January 25 2019



Nutrition Labels. Credit: American Heart Association

Health-related factors have a significant impact on the foods people buy. With the seemingly overwhelming number of products on shelves, a new survey offers insights into which information on food labels is most influential—and on how additional information might lead to healthier dietary choices.

According to the survey, conducted by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation and the American Heart Association, almost all Americans (95 percent) report that they always or sometimes look for healthy options when food shopping.

Consumers say they are more likely to consult [food labels](#) for healthfulness when buying a product for the first time.

However, there is a gap between [consumers'](#) desire to find [information](#) about healthy foods and their ability to do so. Only a little more than one-quarter (28 percent) say it's easy to find healthy foods, while 11 percent say it's difficult, and the remainder report it is only moderately easy.

"We know consumers are making efforts to eat healthier," said Joseph Clayton, CEO of the IFIC Foundation. "But our research indicates that their ability to locate the information they find most helpful can be a barrier to making healthier choices. Even subtle changes to food labels could have a positive impact on [public health](#)."

When it comes to the wide array of sources where consumers get information about the healthfulness of foods—whether in-store, online or in other marketing statements—the Nutrition Facts panel was the top source (69 percent), followed by the ingredients list (67 percent),

according to the survey. More consumers primarily consulted labels for ingredients they were seeking (45 percent) than for ingredients they were avoiding (31 percent).



American Heart Association.
Healthy for Good™

EAT SMART

WITH FOOD NUTRITION LABELS

The Nutrition Facts label can help you make healthier choices. **Use it!**
Here's what to look for:

1	Nutrition Facts
	6, 12, 18 or 24 servings per container Serving size 1 egg (50g)
2	Amount Per Serving Calories 60
	<small>% Daily Value*</small>
3	Total Fat 4g 5%
	Saturated Fat 1g 6%
	Trans Fat 0g
	Polyunsaturated Fat 1g
	Monounsaturated Fat 2g
	Cholesterol 170mg 57%
	Sodium 65mg 3%
	Total Carbohydrate 0g 0%
	Dietary Fiber 0g 0%
	Total Sugars 0g
Includes 0g Added Sugars 0%	
4	Protein 6g 13%
	Vitamin D 6mcg 30%
	Calcium 28mg 2%
	Iron 1mg 6%
	Potassium 69mg 2%
	Vitamin E 5mcg 35%
	Riboflavin 0.3mg 25%
	Folate 45mcg 10%
	Vitamin B12 1mcg 40%
	Biotin 10mcg 35%
	Pantothenic Acid 1mg 20%
	Iodine 60mcg 40%
	Zinc 1mg 10%
	Selenium 22mcg 40%
	Molybdenum 8mcg 20%
Choline 147mg 25%	
5	<small>*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.</small>
	<small>Saturated Fat 25% less than ordinary eggs; 1g vs 1.5g (quantities rounded)</small>

1 **Start with serving information.**
This will tell you the size of a single serving and how many servings are in the package.

2 **Check total calories.**
Do the math to know how many calories you're really getting if you eat the whole package.

3 **Limit certain nutrients.**
Compare labels and choose options with lower amounts of added sugars, sodium, saturated fat and trans fat when possible.

4 **Get enough of beneficial nutrients.**
Eat foods with nutrients your body needs, like calcium, choline, dietary fiber, iron, magnesium, potassium, and Vitamins A, C, D and E.*

5 **Understand % Daily Value.**

- The % Daily Value (DV) tells you the percentage of each nutrient in a single serving in terms of the daily recommended amount.
- To consume less of a nutrient (such as saturated fat or sodium), choose foods with a lower % DV (5% or less).
- To consume more of a nutrient (such as fiber or potassium), choose foods with a higher % DV (20% or more).

For more tips and tricks on eating smart, visit HEART.ORG/EATSMART

EAT SMART

ADD COLOR

MOVE MORE

BE WELL

*Source: 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Making the most of the Nutrition Facts Label infographic. Credit: American Heart Association

Consumers indicate they pay a lot of attention to health-related iconography currently on food labels, but they say additional information could prove even more helpful. Nearly Half of those surveyed (48 percent) say they frequently check front-of-package icons like Facts Up Front and the American Heart Association's [Heart-Check mark](#). About three in five (62 percent) are at least somewhat familiar with the Heart-Check symbol in particular, with Millennials being the age cohort who are most aware (35 percent are very familiar with the icon).

"Shoppers say they are overwhelmed with choices and conflicting nutrition information," Cheryl Anderson, Ph.D., professor and interim chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Public Health at the UC San Diego School of Medicine, and science volunteer and chair of the Nutrition Committee of the American Heart Association.

"Meaningful health labeling like the Heart-Check mark may help shoppers choose foods with higher diet quality that support good health."

Consumers say a universal "healthy" symbol or image on a [food](#) package could go a long way toward encouraging better dietary choices: 54 percent say such a symbol would be very helpful, and 45 percent say it would make them more likely to purchase a given product, especially among those who aren't traditionally shopping for healthy foods.

Methodology

The survey's findings were derived from an [online survey](#) of 1,017

Americans ages 18–80 who have sole or shared responsibility for their households' grocery shopping. It was conducted Oct. 16 to 26, 2018, using Research Now's consumer panel. Results were representative of the U.S. population by region, gender, age, race/ethnicity and household income.

Provided by American Heart Association

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