



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

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Service
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Leader Training Guide

Reading & Understanding Food Labels

Objective:

Upon the completion of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify the main parts of the Nutrition Facts Label.
- Identify the nutrients they should increase and decrease the intake of.
- Use the Nutrition Facts Label on food packages to make healthy food choices.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Have you ever wondered what is in the food or drink you're consuming? Nutrition Facts Labels have the answers. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) require manufacturers to label packaged and processed foods and beverages so people can make informed food choices. These food labels help consumers understand the nutrients they are getting from the products. They also assist individuals with allergies or dietary restrictions in avoiding certain ingredients.

Lesson:

Activity 1: Discuss with participants ways that they use food labels.

Examples:

- To identify the item.
- To identify the ingredients.
- To identify the quantity or servings of the package.
- To identify the nutrients in the item.
- To identify the number of calories.

Food labels have helpful information that can help us make healthy food choices. An essential part of food labels is the Nutrition Facts Label on all packaged foods. (Show an example of a Nutrition Facts Label for an item.) The Nutrition Facts Label has many parts. Today, we are going to talk about some of them.

Activity 2: Looking at a Nutrition Fact Label. *Provide copies or have the Nutrition Facts Label projected for everyone to see. Use this label for frozen lasagna as a reference for the lesson.*

Food Labels – Serving Size

Serving sizes are standardized, meaning the serving size for similar products is usually the same, making it easy to compare identical foods. For instance, the serving size listed for most cereals is one cup.

Pay close attention to serving sizes. The serving size on the label may be different from the amount you typically eat at one time.

**Point to the serving size on the label on the visual. **

Look at the Nutrition Facts Label on the visual. Can someone tell me the serving size on this Nutrition Facts Label for this frozen lasagna? (*Highlighted in blue*)

**Share the correct answer if it wasn't said. Answer: 1 cup*
Is this the amount of lasagna you would eat at one time?

If you were to eat twice this amount of lasagna, you would need to multiply all the nutrient values by 2 to determine the correct amounts of lasagna you ate. On the other hand, if you ate half the amount of the lasagna listed on the Nutrition Facts Label, you would divide the nutrient values by 2. For example, $\frac{1}{2}$ a cup would be 140 calories.

Food Labels- Calories

How many calories are in 1 serving of the lasagna?

**Point to the calories on the label. Share the correct answer if it wasn't said. Answer: 280 calories*

If you were to eat two servings, how many calories would that be?

**Share the correct answer if it wasn't said. Answer: 560 calories*

Food Labels- Percent Daily Value (%DV)

**Point to the label's Percent Daily Value (%DV). Highlighted in purple*

The Percent Daily Value (%DV) is the amount of a nutrient in one serving of the food compared to the amount recommended for a 2,000-calorie diet (all food labels are based on a 2,000-calorie diet unless otherwise specified). The Percent Daily Value is a way to compare two different foods to tell which is higher or lower in a particular nutrient.

For example, if you compare the Percent Daily Value of fiber in 1 serving of 2 different frozen lasagnas, you will see which one is higher in fiber.

High in a nutrient (20% DV or more)

The Percent Daily Value helps you determine if a food is high in nutrients. A food is considered high in a nutrient if that nutrient has a Percent Daily Value of 20% or more. Look at the Nutrition Facts Label on the visual. What is the Percent Daily Value of saturated fat for lasagna?

**Share the correct answer if it wasn't said. Answer: 23%*

How about sodium?

**Share the correct answer if it wasn't said. Answer: 37%*

They are higher than 20%, meaning this frozen lasagna is high in saturated fat and sodium.

Low in a nutrient (5% DV or less)

The Percent Daily Value also helps us understand if food is low in nutrients. Food is low in nutrients if the Percent Daily Value is 5% or less. Look at the Nutrition Facts Label in the visual. What is the Percent Daily Value for added sugars?

**Share the correct answer if it's not said. Answer: 0%*

How about the Percent Daily Value of vitamin D?

**Share the correct answer if it was not said. Answer: 0%*

They are lower than 5%, meaning this frozen lasagna is low in added sugars and vitamin D.

Nutrients to increase

Every day, we should get at least 100% of the daily value of these nutrients from the foods we eat:

- Dietary Fiber
- Vitamin D
- Calcium
- Iron
- Potassium

Nutrients to limit

Each day, eat no more than 100% of the daily value of these nutrients:

- Total Fat
- Saturated Fat
- Trans Fat (there is no daily value for trans-fat; keep as low as possible)
- Sodium
- Added Sugars

The nutrition Fact label will list these nutrients in grams (g) or milligrams (mg), which are minimal weight measures.

Ways to Use Nutrition Facts Label for Healthy Options

Compare Foods: Use %DV to compare food products (remember to make sure the serving size is the same) and more often choose products that are higher in nutrients you want to get more of and lower in nutrients you want to get less of.

Understand Nutrient Content Claims: Use %DV to help distinguish one claim from another, such as "light", "low", "reduced". Simply compare the %DV in each food product to see which one is higher or lower in a particular nutrient. There is no need to memorize definitions.

Dietary Trade-Offs: You can use the %DV to help you make dietary trade-offs with other foods throughout the day. You don't have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. When a food you like is high in saturated fat, balance it with foods low in saturated fat at other times of the day. Also, pay attention to how much you eat during the entire day so that the total amount of saturated fat and other nutrients you want to limit stays below 100% DV.

Lesson Summary:

Read the Nutrition Facts Label to make healthy Choices.

- Start by reading the serving size and number of servings per container.
- Check the calories per serving.
- Next, look at the nutrients listed on the label (fat, cholesterol, sodium, fiber, protein, vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium).
- Aim to get 100% of the Percent Daily Value of fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium daily.
- Limit fat, sodium, and added sugars daily to no more than 100% of the Daily Value. Circle the nutrients you plan to look at when comparing foods at the grocery store.

Suggested Activities:

Print and give all members a copy of the Frozen Lasagna Nutrition Facts Label (attached) to reference throughout the lesson. Encourage each member to bring a nutrition facts label to explore for additional practice.

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Sources/References:

Colorado State University Extension. (2016) *Eating Smart Being Active: Plan, Shop, Save*
<https://eatingsmartbeingactive.colostate.edu/>

FDA. (2024) *How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label*.

<https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-facts-label/how-understand-and-use-nutrition-facts-label>

Sample Label for Frozen Lasagna

