How to Read a Nutrition Facts Label and Compare Packaged Fo

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Use the Nutrition Facts label without confusing a serving, a package, and the amount you actually eat. These 23 steps cover serving size, servings per container, calories, fats, sodium, carbohydrate, fiber, total and added sugars, protein, vitamins and minerals, % Daily Value, ingredient order, allergen declarations, fair product comparisons, front-of-pack claims, recipe portions, cost, and repeat label checks.

Things you will need

- Two comparable packages with complete Nutrition Facts and ingredient information
- A comparison sheet with separate serving, package, and actual-portion columns
- A measuring cup, spoons, or kitchen scale for visualizing portions
- A calculator for serving and recipe adjustments
- Current allergen information and any personal dietary guidance
- Optional price, storage, and meal-planning notes for the final choice

Starting With the Package and Serving Information

1. **Collect the full labels for both packages**
   Choose comparable packaged foods and locate the complete label on each package.
2. **Note the serving size and servings per container**
   Read the serving size and the number of servings per container before looking at calories.
3. **Decide the portion you will actually eat**
   Decide what portion you will actually eat or drink without treating the labeled serving as a recommendation.
4. **Set up a two-product comparison worksheet**
   Create a comparison sheet with separate columns for labeled serving, package contents, and actual portion.

Reading Calories and Nutrients in Context

5. **Scale calories to the portion you eat**
   Read calories per serving and scale them to your actual portion before comparing products.
6. **Log the three fat rows separately**
   Review total fat, saturated fat, and trans fat as separate label rows with different meanings.
7. **Compare sodium on one serving basis**
   Check sodium in milligrams and % Daily Value on the same serving basis.
8. **Read carbohydrate, fiber, and sugar rows together**
   Read total carbohydrate, dietary fiber, total sugars, and added sugars together.
9. **Record protein and declared micronutrients**
   Note protein and the listed vitamins and minerals without collapsing them into one score.

Using % Daily Value and Ingredient Information

10. Interpret the daily value share per serving

Interpret % Daily Value as each nutrient's contribution to a daily reference amount.

11. Apply the five and twenty percent rule

Use the 5% and 20% Daily Value guide as a quick nutrient comparison, not an overall food grade.

12. Rank the nutrients you want to limit

Compare saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars when you want to limit those nutrients.

13. Look for extra fiber and micronutrients

Compare dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium when you want more of those nutrients.

14. Read the ingredient list in order

Read the ingredient list in order and use it to understand what the product contains.

Comparing Two Products Fairly

15. Verify allergen statements on each package

Check allergen declarations and the complete ingredient list before comparing other features.

16. Put both products on one comparison basis

Normalize both products to the same comparison basis before deciding which numbers are lower or higher.

17. Weigh calories against the whole meal

Compare calories with portion weight and the food's role in the meal.

18. Mark the lower sodium, fat, and sugar

Compare sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars using the normalized amounts and your actual portion.

19. Weigh the trade-offs beyond nutrient rows

Compare fiber, protein, micronutrients, and ingredient differences alongside the nutrients you want to limit.

Making and Recording the Choice

20. Test front-of-pack claims against the panel

Evaluate front-of-pack claims against the Nutrition Facts panel and ingredient list.

21. Recalculate nutrients for the cooked recipe

Recalculate the nutrients for the amount used in a recipe or combined meal.

22. Judge price, storage, and waste too

Consider price, storage, waste, and the rest of the meal after completing the nutrition comparison.

23. File the choice with a review date

Record the selected product, portion, reason, and review date in your shopping or meal notes.

Sources

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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/Read-a-Nutrition-Facts-Label-and-Compare-Packaged-Foods. Corrections: htt