

# WELLNESSMONTHLY

Be Mindful When Shopping for Food | **March 2023**



*March is National Nutrition Month, a good time to think about whether your diet supplies all the nutrients your body needs.*

## Be Mindful When Shopping for Food

Your body needs nutrients for growth, energy and to restore itself during sleep. The less nutritious foods you eat, the higher your risk for obesity, chronic diseases and sleep disorders.

According to the science-based [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) of all ages:

- A healthy, dietary pattern reduces chronic disease risk
- Nutritional needs change as people get older
- Early preferences influence food choices later in life

Nutrient-dense foods and beverages provide health-promoting chemicals. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry – when prepared with no or little added sugars, saturated fat and sodium – are rich in nutrients.

Processed and ultra-processed foods tend to be less nutritious than whole foods. For example, the milling process strips fiber, iron and vitamins from grains. Processing also typically involves additives such as preservatives; artificial colors and flavors; stabilizers and emulsifiers; salt; sugar; fats and refined oils.

While it takes a little extra time, comparing product nutrition labels before tossing something into the basket can make a difference in your health over the long run.

### Essential Nutrients

Certain vitamins and minerals are essential micronutrients. Carbohydrates, proteins, fats and water are essential macronutrients. Phytonutrients are compounds found in fruits, vegetables, beans and grains. [Antioxidants](#) are phytonutrients that include vitamins C and E, selenium and carotenoids.

Vitamins and certain trace minerals are needed in small amounts and macronutrients in relative large amounts. However, excess amounts of micronutrients can be toxic, and too many macronutrients can contribute to weight gain and related disorders.

With the exception of vitamin D, your body does not produce micronutrients; they have to be obtained through food. [Essential micronutrients](#) include iron, vitamins A and D, iodine, zinc and folate (folic acid or vitamin B9).

Minerals help cells turn nutrients into energy and deliver oxygen throughout the body. Electrolytes are minerals that carry electrical signals from nerves to muscles, balance fluids and help maintain pH balance in your blood. Some sports drinks contain electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium, phosphate and magnesium to replace essential minerals lost during sweating or urination.

Most people get the minerals they need through their diet. However, supplements may be recommended when symptoms of illness are linked to mineral deficiencies that can be detected with blood tests.

Dietary carbohydrates increase blood glucose levels and supply energy to cells. Soluble and insoluble dietary fiber (also called roughage), the indigestible part of plant foods, is associated with gut health and reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes and colon cancer.

Proteins are required for tissue production and fluid balance in the body. Dietary proteins are comprised of peptides and amino acids. Among 20 different amino acids, nine are essential and must be obtained through diet.

Fats (fatty acids and glycerol) are required for tissue growth and hormone production. Foods containing unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) help lower risk of heart disease. Trans fats are a banned ingredient in the U.S. because they are linked to inflammation, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other chronic conditions. Most nutrition experts recommend limiting saturated fat to under 10 percent of calories a day because a diet high in saturated fats can drive up total cholesterol and increase disease risk, [according to an article published by Harvard Medical School](#).

## Food Choices

Food choices may be influenced by your health status, culture or taste preferences. For example, you may avoid salt because you have high blood pressure, enjoy spicy dishes or dislike eggs. Shopping and meal preparation are tasks that often depend on how much time you have, whether you like to cook, where you live, who you live with, your degree of mobility and your income. Poor diet is one consequence of food insecurity.

If you suspect your diet is not giving you all the nutrients you need, ask a medical professional for advice. In addition to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, other resources available to help you make healthy choices include:

- [MyPlate Plan](#): Food group targets based on your age, gender, height, weight, physical activity level and recommended caloric allowance
- [Start Simple with MyPlate smartphone app](#): Simple daily food goals and progress tracker
- [Dietary Reference Intakes \(DRIs\)](#): A set of scientifically

developed values for nutrients

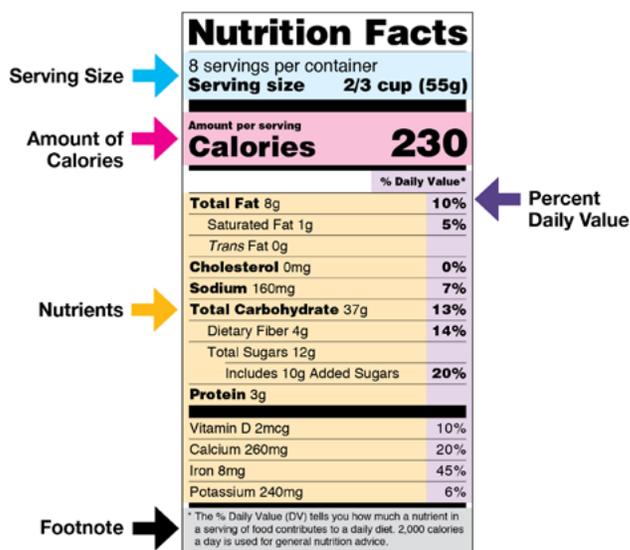
- [6 Tips for Eating Healthy on a Budget](#) and [Eat Well: Resources for people with diabetes](#)
- [U.S. Department of Agriculture Nutrition website](#): information on healthy food choices

## Using the Nutrition Label

The **Nutrition Facts label** can help you learn about the nutrient content of many foods in your diet.

Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. In general, a healthy diet is one that is lower in saturated fat, sodium and added sugars and higher in dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium.

[Refer to this chart](#) to identify how many calories you need per day based on your gender, age and activity level.



(For educational purposes only. These labels do not meet the labeling requirements described in 21 CFR 101.9.)