



Label Literacy: Fat and Cholesterol

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Fat is not a bad thing. It is a concentrated source of calories in your diet. It helps your body absorb and transport fat-soluble vitamins. It is a form of stored energy. It protects your internal organs from the bumps of daily life. It helps keep you warm.

Cholesterol is not a bad thing either. It is a fat-like substance used by your body to make cell membranes, vitamin D, and some hormones and digestive juices. Your body makes some of its own cholesterol and you get some from food.

But too much fat and/or cholesterol in your food are not good. Diets high in fat—especially saturated fat—and cholesterol are associated with increased blood cholesterol levels in adults. Increased blood cholesterol levels are associated with an increased risk of heart disease.

Fat and the Food Label

The amount of total fat in a serving of food can be found on the **Nutrition Facts** label on food products just under the information on calories per serving. The amount for total fat is listed in grams (g) and as a percent of the Daily Value. The Percent Daily Value (% Daily Value) for fat gives a general idea of how much fat a serving contributes to a 2,000 calorie reference diet. The % Daily Value for the reference diet is based on the idea that 30 percent or less of calories should come from fat. For the reference diet this is 65 grams.

You also can find information on calories from fat to the right of the information about calories per serving on the nutrition label. This is the number of calories that are supplied by fat in a serving of food. (The numbers may be rounded for labeling purposes.) The calories from fat are calculated by multiplying the number of grams of fat by nine calories per gram. For example, if a serving of food contains 10 grams of fat, you could multiply 10 g by 9 calories per gram and find there are 90 calories from fat in a serving of the food.

Information about saturated fat is also found on the **Nutrition Facts** label. Saturated fat should provide no more than 10 percent of the calories in

Cholesterol and the Nutrition Facts Label

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 16 crackers (29g)	
Servings Per Container about 10	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 140	Calories From Fat 50
%Daily Value*	
Total Fat 6g	9%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Cholesterol 50mg	16%
Sodium 75mg	3%
Total Carbohydrate 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Sugars 2g	
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0% • Calcium 0% • Iron 4%	
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80 g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g 25 g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300 mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400 mg
Total Carbohydrate	300mg 375 g
Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram:	
Fat	9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

your diet. As with total fat, the amount of saturated fat in a serving is listed in grams (g) and as a percent of the Daily Value on the nutrition label. The % Daily Value for saturated fat on the nutrition label is based on 20 grams. This number comes from the 2,000 calorie reference diet.

How Much Dietary Fat Should You Eat?

The information provided by % Daily Value on the nutrition label is based on a 2,000 calorie reference diet. But what do you do if you eat a smaller or a greater number of calories per day? Use the charts in this fact sheet to find the amount of fat and calories from fat that fit the way you eat.

You can use the information in the charts more than one way. First, you can count the grams of either total or saturated fat you eat on a typical day. Find the number of grams of fat per serving on the Nutrition Facts label and add them together for all the foods eaten on that day. Your total should be no more than the daily total fat or saturated fat values given on the charts. If it is greater, you can look for lower-fat alternatives to some of the food choices you usually make. (Some foods such as fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables will not have a nutrition label. The nutrition information for those foods is available at the supermarket. You may want to take notes for some of the common fresh foods you eat. This will allow you to add those foods to your calculations as well.)

A second use for the charts is to use the information on % Daily Value. Find the % Daily Value on the Nutrition Facts labels of the foods you are eating. Total those values for all the foods you eat in one day. That total should be no more than the % Daily Value of total or saturated fat for the number of calories you eat in one day.

Whether or not you eat 2,000 calories on a typical day, you can still use the information provided on the Nutrition Facts label on grams of fat and % Daily Value to compare similar foods. For example, you may find that a serving of one brand of chips provides 9 g of total fat and 14% of the Daily Value for total fat and another provides 7 g and 11%. If you are trying to decrease the amount of fat in your diet, the lower-fat product will be a better choice.

The amount of cholesterol in a serving of food is listed in milligrams (mg) and as a percent of the Daily Value on the Nutrition Facts label just below the information on total and saturated fat. Nutritionists recommend diets contain 300 mg of cholesterol or less per day, no matter how many calories are eaten.

For More Information see other fact sheets in the Label Literacy series.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Samuel E. Curl, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$287.00 for 4,000 copies. #8893 0597 CC.

Total Fat Intake Recommended at Different Calorie Levels

<i>Calories eaten per day:</i>	<i>Daily total fat needs: not more than (grams)*</i>	<i>Daily calories from fat are: not more than (gram)*</i>	<i>Total % Daily Value for fat in all the foods eaten in one day can add up to:*</i>
1,600	53 g	480	80%
2,000	65 g	585	100%
2,200	73 g	660	110%
2,500	80 g	720	125%
2,800	93 g	840	140%
3,200	107 g	960	160%

*Numbers may be rounded.

Saturated Fat Intake Recommended at Different Calorie Levels

<i>Calories eaten per day:</i>	<i>Daily saturated fat needs: not more than (grams)*</i>	<i>Total % Daily Value for fat in all the foods eaten in one day can add up to:*</i>
1,600	18 g	80%
2,000	20 g	100%
2,200	24 g	110%
2,500	25 g	125%
2,800	30 g	140%
3,200	36 g	160%

*Numbers may be rounded.

References:

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