

# Protect Your Heart: Check Food Labels to Make Heart-Healthy Choices

## Toolkit No. 9

You can make heart-healthy choices by checking food labels.

- The **Nutrition Facts** tell you the serving size and the amount of various nutrients such as total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and fiber per serving.
- **Nutrient content claims** such as “low-fat” provide a reliable description of the product.
- The **list of ingredients** shows the ingredients in descending order by weight.

## The Nutrition Facts

Here’s an example of a **Nutrition Facts** section. At the top, you’ll see the serving size and the number of servings per container. How does the serving size compare to your usual serving? For example, if you usually eat 2 cups of chili with beans, you’ll need to double all of the numbers in this Nutrition Facts section.

### Chili with Beans

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size: 1 cup (253 g) Servings per container: 2	
Amount per Serving:	
<b>Calories</b> 260	Calories from Fat 72
	<b>% Daily Value</b>
<b>Total Fat</b> 8g	13%
Saturated Fat 3g	17%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 130mg	44%
<b>Sodium</b> 1010mg	42%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 22g	7%
Dietary Fiber 9g	36%
Sugars 4g	
<b>Protein</b> 25g	

## Total Amounts

To make heart-healthy food choices, check the total amounts so you can cut back on

- total fat
- saturated fat
- cholesterol
- sodium

You’ll also see information on fiber. To lower your risk of heart disease, choose foods with more fiber.

## How to use information on total amounts

Total amounts are shown in grams, abbreviated as **g**, or in milligrams, shown as **mg**. A gram is a very small amount and a milligram is one-thousandth of that. For example, a nickel weighs about 5 grams. So does a teaspoonful of margarine. Here are ways to use the information on total amounts:

- Compare labels of similar foods. Choose the product with a smaller amount of saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Try to select foods with more fiber.
- Keep in mind that a low-fat food has 3 grams of fat per serving.
- Choose food with the least amount of saturated fat. Look for foods with  $\frac{1}{3}$  or less of the total fat as saturated fat.
- Another practical way of choosing lower-fat foods is to select foods that have 3 grams of fat or less for every 100 calories, every 15 grams of carbohydrate, or every 7 to 8 grams of protein.

## How much fat should I eat in a day?

A general guideline is 40 to 60 grams of fat per day for many women or for people on lower calorie diets and 60 to 80 grams of fat per day for most men. Talk with your health care team about how many grams of fat would be right for you. Some people may need more or less fat

depending on their targets for blood glucose (sugar) and cholesterol.

Check food labels to see how much fat you're getting. You can also ask your health care team for saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and dietary fiber targets. Write your daily targets here:

- Total fat (grams): \_\_\_\_\_
- Saturated fat (grams): \_\_\_\_\_
- Cholesterol (milligrams): \_\_\_\_\_
- Sodium (milligrams): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dietary fiber (grams): \_\_\_\_\_

## Nutrient Content Claims

A quick way to find heart-healthy foods is to check the nutrient content claims on the label. For example, you'll see the claim "less sodium" on some brands of chili with beans. This means the product has at least 25% less sodium than the regular version. You can rely on claims such as "low fat" because the government has defined those terms, as shown here. It's against the law for food manufacturers to make false claims.

Claims for fat
<b>Fat free:</b> less than 0.5 g of fat or saturated fat per serving
<b>Saturated fat free:</b> less than 0.5 g of saturated fat and less than 0.5 g of <i>trans</i> fatty acids
<b>Low fat:</b> 3 g or less of total fat
<b>Low saturated fat:</b> 1 g or less
<b>Reduced fat or less fat:</b> at least 25% less fat than the regular version

Claims for cholesterol
<b>Cholesterol free:</b> less than 2 mg per serving
<b>Low cholesterol:</b> 20 mg or less
<b>Reduced cholesterol or less cholesterol:</b> at least 25% less cholesterol than the regular version

Claims for sodium
<b>Sodium free or salt free:</b> less than 5 mg per serving
<b>Very low sodium:</b> 35 mg or less
<b>Low sodium:</b> 140 mg or less
<b>Reduced sodium or less sodium:</b> at least 25% less sodium than the regular version

Claims for fiber
<b>High fiber:</b> 5 g or more per serving
<b>Good source of fiber:</b> 2.5 g to 4.9 g per serving

## List of Ingredients

Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight, meaning that the first ingredient makes up the largest proportion of the food. Check the ingredient list to spot things you'd like to avoid, such as coconut oil or palm oil, which are high in saturated fat. Also try to avoid hydrogenated oils. They are not listed by total amount on the label, but you can choose foods that don't list hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil in the ingredient list. For example, this ingredient list for chili with beans shows no hydrogenated oil. Or look for heart-healthy ingredients such as soy.

Chili with Beans
Ingredients: water, beef, beans, tomatoes, modified food starch, chili powder, salt, sugar, flavoring.

For more help, ask your health care team for copies of these brochures:

- Toolkit No. 6: *Protect Your Heart: Make Wise Food Choices*
- Toolkit No. 7: *Protect Your Heart: Choose Fats Wisely*
- Toolkit No. 8: *Protect Your Heart: Cook with Heart-Healthy Foods*

