

If you have eaten packaged food without reading and understanding the nutrition facts label on the packet, then you need to be worried.

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Reading and understanding food labels is very important to differentiate healthy from unhealthy options in packaged foods. Although the consumption of packaged and processed food is not considered healthy, understanding nutrition facts labels can help you choose healthier options, says Ratika Vinchurkar, Dietician at RXDX.

Here's a quick guide on how to read labels containing nutrition facts:

Serving size: This tells you the serving size (one portion that a person should eat at one time) of the product and the number of servings (total number of portions) in the packet/ box. If the serving size is 1 cup and you eat 2 cups, you consume twice the calories, fat and other nutrients mentioned on the food label.

Calories: It tells you how many calories are present in one serving of that food. The total calories consumed depend on the number of servings you eat.



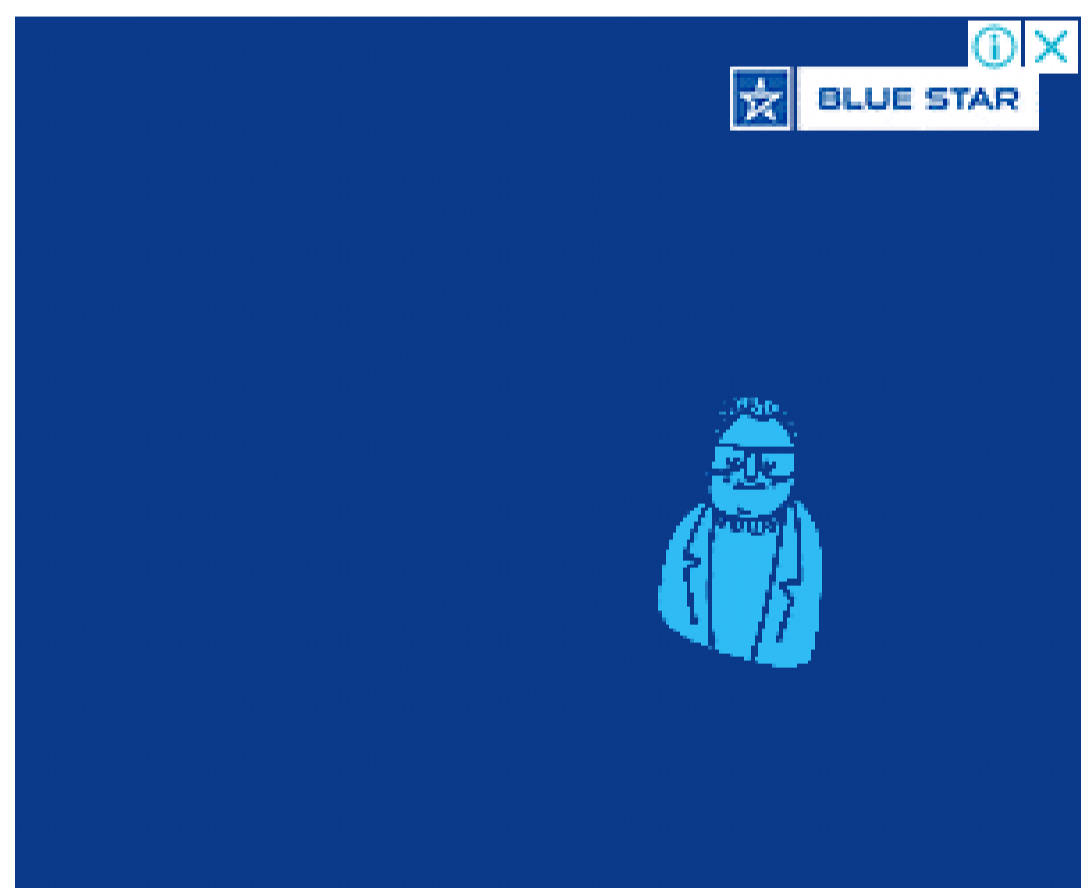
A general guide for calories according to the FDA:

- 40 calories per serving is considered low
- 100 calories is moderate
- 400 calories or more is high

This guide is based on a daily 2000 calorie diet

List of nutrients: Nutrients are substances in the food that our body need to grow and function. On the food label, the first nutrients are the ones that we should try to avoid such as like fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium. The next set of nutrients mentioned are the ones we should try to consume more like vitamins, dietary fibre, calcium, vitamins and iron.

Percentage Daily Value (% DV): It tells you the percentage of each nutrient present in a single serving, in terms of the daily recommended quantity. These values are based on a 2000-calorie diet per day. You can use this guide to compare the nutrient content of different foods:



5% DV or less is considered low

15% DV or more is considered high

Try to get more of these nutrients- Vitamins, iron, calcium, fibre and protein

Try to get less of these nutrients- Fat, sodium, sugar and cholesterol

What are Nutrition claims?

Any claim on the packet that states or implies that the food has particular beneficial properties due to calories or a particular nutrient such as fat or fibre is called a nutrition claim. These nutritional claims must meet government regulations before appearing on the package.

Some of the common nutrition claims and their meanings are:

Low fat: It means that the food contains 3 grams or lesser fat content in 1 serving size as mentioned on the label.

Fat-free: The food contains no more than 0.5 g of fat per 100g or 100 ml of the food.

Low sugar: The product contains no more than 5 g of sugars per 100 g for solids or 2.5 g of sugars per 100 ml for liquids.

Sugar-free: This means that the food contains no more than 0.5 of sugars per 100 g or 100 ml of that food.

Cholesterol- free: This claim means that the food has less than 2 mg of cholesterol in 1 serving size and it is also low in saturated and trans fat.

Reduced in calories/ low calorie: Reduced in calories means that the food has at least 25% lesser calories than the regular version of that food.

Source of fibre: It means that the food provides at least 2 grams of fibre in 1 serving size. "High source of fibre" means the food provides 4 grams of fibre and "very high source of fibre" means 6 grams.