READING FOOD LABELS: A GREAT TWO-MINUTE DRILL

OBJECTIVES:
1. Why are food labels important?
2. Parts of a food label:
   a. Serving size
   b. Calories
   c. Percentage daily value
   d. Fat
   e. Sodium
   f. Fiber
   g. Vitamins & Minerals
   h. Protein

INDIANA STANDARDS
(Grades 6-8).1.1 Compare how healthy behaviors and personal health are linked.
(Grades 6-8).1.7 Identify the benefits of practicing healthy behaviors.
(Grades 6-8).5.6 Distinguish healthy options over unhealthy options when making a decision.
(Grades 6-8).7.2 Indicate healthy behaviors that will maintain or improve the health of self and others.

TEACHER TALKING POINTS
Why are food labels important?
• They can help you decide what to choose as part of your healthy eating plan.
• Lets you know what the ingredients in the food are and where the food came from.
• Two agencies – the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) - require that all food labels show the same nutrition and health information.
• Look at the food label as a whole, not only specific pieces of it, to get the full picture.

Parts of a food label:
 a. Serving size
   i. Always start with the serving size amount, which is usually found at the top of the label. The rest of the information on the label is based on that amount
   ii. Sometimes you’d be surprised that what you think is one serving (i.e. a bag of potato chips) is actually two servings.
   iii. When you compare calories and nutrients between brands, be sure to check and see if the serving size is the same.

 b. Calories
   i. A calorie is a way to measure how much energy a food provides to your body.
   The number on the food label shows how many calories are in one serving of that food.
ii. The number of calories a person needs varies, depending on that person’s gender, age, weight and activity level.

iii. Remember that fat-free doesn’t mean calorie-free. In fact, lower fat items may have just as many calories as full-fat versions.

c. Percentage daily value

   i. These percentages show the amounts of nutrients an average person will get from eating one serving of that food. For the purposes of food labels, the government chose an “average” person as someone who needs 2,000 calories a day. So if the label on a particular food shows it provides 25 percent of vitamin D, that 25 percent is for a person who eats 2,000 calories a day.

   ii. A food is considered a “good source” of a nutrient if the percent daily value is between 10 percent and 19 percent. If the food has 20 percent or more of the daily value, it is considered an “excellent source” of that nutrient.

d. Fat

   i. Total fat shows how much fat is in a single serving of food. Our bodies need a little fat every day because it is an important source of energy. Fats also provide insulation and cushioning for the skin, bones, and internal organs, and help the body distribute and store certain vitamins.

   ii. Unsaturated fats, which are found in vegetable oils, nuts and fish, are often called “good fats” because they don’t raise cholesterol levels.

   iii. Saturated fats and trans fats are considered “bad” because they can increase a person’s risk for developing heart disease. These fats typically come from animal products like cheese or meat.

e. Sodium

   i. Sodium is a component of salt. Almost all packaged foods contain sodium because it adds flavor and helps preserve food. Foods that are processed, packaged or canned usually have more sodium than fresh foods, which are naturally low in sodium.

   ii. Our bodies need some sodium but too much can cause some people to have high blood pressure and water retention.

f. Fiber

   i. Fiber is the indigestible part of plant foods that push through our digestive system, absorbing water along the way and easing bowel movement. Fiber has no calories and can help you feel full.

   ii. Ideally you should select foods that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving.

g. Nutrients

   i. You would like your foods to have a lot of vitamins and minerals as our bodies need vitamins and minerals to help them work - from supporting skin health (B2) to helping in the formation of bones (calcium).

   ii. Look for foods that are rich in nutrients such as Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Calcium and Iron.

   • When you read Nutrition labels, try to select foods that are high in fiber, vitamins and minerals and low in sugar, sodium, fat and cholesterol.
STUDENT ACTIVITY – Food Ranking Activity

A food-ranking activity is a way for students to learn what’s important on a nutrition label when making healthy food choices. To do this activity, bring in six to eight different foods with labels. Without looking at the labels, ask students to rank the foods in order of what they think is the healthiest down to the least healthy. Once they determine the order, they can then analyze the nutrition labels to see if they correctly ranked them.

A variation on this activity is to rank the foods on a specific component on the label, such as most calories to least calories or the most vitamin A to the least.
FAMILY INFORMATION

As a parent you want to ensure that the meals you prepare for your family are healthy. Here are some guidelines on using food labels to plan nutritious and healthy meals for an overall well-balanced diet.

- Offer your family a variety of fresh, unpackaged produce in a rainbow of colors at each meal and snack. This helps ensure that they get a wide variety of nutrients without unnecessary calories. Remember that at least half the plate should be filled with vegetables at both lunch and dinner.
- Choose a diet low in total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Limit total fat intake to about 30 percent of total calories per day.
- Read serving size information. What looks like a small package of food can actually contain more than one serving.
- Limit foods with added sugar and pay attention to the amount of sodium in the foods you buy.
- For after-school snacking, select healthy snacks (think fruits, vegetables, whole grains) rather than potato chips and or desserts, which are typically high in calories, fat and sodium.

For the parent who prefers to send lunch to school with their child, these tips may be helpful for you:

- For foods that come with more than one serving per package, involve your child by having him/her measure out one serving.
- If your child prefers sandwiches don’t limit yourself to traditional breads. Try whole-grain tortillas, pitas, and even whole grain English muffins as a sandwich base. You should be able to sneak in some additional fiber or whole grains this way.
- Remember that spreads and dressing count in your child’s overall calorie intake so rather than mayo on a sandwich, try mustard or hummus instead. If you send cut-up vegetables or fruits along with lunch, be choosy about what you send as a dip.
- Fill your sandwich with lots of “extras” such as vegetables (lettuce, onions, mushrooms, cucumber, etc.)
- Granola bars are easy and “packable” for a delicious snack; remember to watch the food labels as some of these have just as much fat and calories as cookies or cake.
1. A calorie is a way to measure how much energy a food will provide to your body. ___True ___False

2. Fat-free typically also means calorie-free. ___True ___False

3. There are good fats in foods. ___True ___False

4. Foods that are processed, packaged or canned are usually high in salt or sodium. ___True ___False

5. Foods that are high in fiber are generally good for you. ___True ___False