Nutrition Labels: What are you eating?

Reading nutrition labels on food items is helpful to many people and for varied reasons, but whatever the case may be, it is important that the information is understood. The top of the label beings with product specific information about serving sizes and servings per box. Calories are listed next which tells how much energy is gained (from one serving). Calories from fat are on the same line, and tell you how many calories from the total amount of calories (from one serving) come from fat. The various fats that are listed are shown separate because saturated and trans fats are notorious for raising the bad (LDL) cholesterol while lowering the (HDL) good cholesterol levels. Not all fats are harmful though. Unsaturated fats however, are essential to the body because they provide certain fatty acids that the human body cannot synthesize alone. They also help lower unhealthy (LDL) cholesterol and have even been found to lower risk of heart disease. Vitamins and nutrients are listed toward the bottom, but are perhaps the most important. Typically Americans don’t eat foods high in dietary fiber, calcium, iron, Vitamins A & C. Fruits, Vegetables, and many grains provide an abundance of these essential nutrients. The % daily value (%DV) for each item listed, represents how much of each nutrients you receive from consuming one serving. %DVs below 5% are considered low amounts while those above 20% are considered high amounts. It is important to note that these values are calculated according to a 2,000 calorie diet, as indicated in the footnotes of nutrition labels.

Speed Reading Made Easy

Here are five simple steps to gather the information from nutrition labels quickly and effectively.

1. Look at the serving size
2. Check the calories
3. Limit the nutrients in the bold black lines (exception: fiber)
4. Get enough of the vitamins and nutrients listed near the bottom
5. Look at the %DV (<5% = low; >20% = high)