



## Reading Food Labels

One of the most important guidelines for wise food shopping is to read food labels carefully. Most food labels provide a list of ingredients, and many also give additional information about the nutritional value of the contents. The items listed often include:

- Calories
- Fat
- Cholesterol
- Sodium
- Protein
- Vitamins and Minerals

### Ingredients

When looking at any list of ingredients, remember that ingredients are in order of their relative weight. The first ingredient is the one that makes up the greatest part of the product. The last ingredient on the list represents the smallest part of the product, and the others represent amounts in between.

### Nutrition facts

Food labels provide nutritional information for a typical single serving rather than for the entire package or can--unless, of course--that makes up one serving. The serving size is an important measurement, since not all people eat the same amount of food at a single sitting. Try to gauge how close the serving size is to your own eating habits in order to calculate how many nutrients you'll be receiving at each meal.

Food labels also show the amount of certain nutrients per serving along with the "% Daily Value" (DV). The DV is based on a 2,000-calorie diet and is the percentage of each nutrient believed to meet the needs of the average person each day. For example, if a certain food provides 50 percent of the DV for Vitamin C, one serving gives a person half the Vitamin C needed per day.

### **A little reading yields benefits**

The little bit of time that a person spends reading labels at the supermarket can yield tremendous health benefits. Compare brand names to find the highest nutritional value at a reasonable cost. If a favorite food doesn't have nutritional information on the label, write to the manufacturer and ask for a list of nutrients. Finally, don't forget to read the lists of nutrients that may be posted near fresh, unprocessed foods, such as in the butcher's case or produce sections. You'll soon become an expert at ensuring the highest quality nutrition possible for you and your family.