



## Understanding Food Labels

Most food labels now include a guide to help consumers plan a healthy diet. It's called the "Percentage of Daily Value," or DV. DVs act as reference points to help people see what their overall daily dietary needs should be. Reading and understanding these percentages can be a valuable tool in your food choices.

### How are daily values figured?

For labeling purposes, 2,000 calories has been established as the reference point, the average daily energy intake for most people. Different amounts of the following nutrients should contribute to these daily calories: total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates and dietary fiber. For instance, the total amount of fat recommended in a day on a 2,000-calorie diet is less than 65 grams, while the amount of dietary fiber is 25 grams. The DV takes the amount per serving listed for each nutrient and divides that figure by the total recommended daily amount. Thus, if the total fat in a serving is 5 grams, 5 divided by 65 equals 8 percent (rounded off). Likewise, if the dietary fiber is 5 grams, 5 divided by 25 equals 20 percent. Therefore, this product provides 20 percent, or one-fifth, of the dietary fiber the average person should eat in one day. The DVs for any vitamins or minerals are listed as well.

### Putting daily values to use

It's a good idea to know the nutrient content of your diet. Certain links exist between nutrients and health status, such as:

- Eating too much fat or cholesterol has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease.
- Most weight-loss programs recommend a specific limit to the amount of fat a participant should eat each day.
- Increased fiber in the diet may decrease the risk of colon cancer.
- Too much sodium can heighten the risk of high blood pressure in some people.

A doctor or dietitian may tell you what nutrients you should limit and which ones to increase. The DV on labels or those posted in the produce section or butcher section of many markets specifies exactly how much of a nutrient a typical serving of a food contains. If your body type, lifestyle, age, gender or pregnancy or nursing status differs from the 2,000-calorie-a-day standard, you should allow for that, varying your intake to suit your needs. Thus, by utilizing the information obtained by using the daily value information, you can take the guesswork out of planning your diet. This will enable you, in turn, to concentrate on preparing nutritious, delicious meals for yourself and your family.