

# An Insider's Look at the New Food Label

## 5 changes that will mean the most for your health...

It's hard to believe, but the Nutrition Facts Label—that government-mandated nutritional information box on all food products—only recently got its first overhaul in more than 20 years.

**MY TAKE:** While most of the changes to the Nutrition Facts Label are positive, there are still a few traps that can trip up unsuspecting consumers. *The five most important changes—and what each means for you...\**

**CHANGE #1: More realistic portion sizes.** The updated label will help consumers better understand how many calories they are actually getting in their favorite meals, snacks and beverages.

For example, the current (soon-to-be-outdated) label on a typical 20-ounce bottle of soda might list the calories as 100, but this is misleading because that number represents “calories *per serving*.” Most people consume the full bottle in one sitting, which would technically be 2.5 servings. With the new label, a 20-ounce soda will be listed as a single serving with 250 calories.

**WHAT'S GOOD:** Consumers who mistakenly believed that they were getting fewer calories than what were actually in the food or beverage will now have a much easier time keeping track of their daily calorie intake. This can help with weight control—a crucial factor in minimizing risk for diabetes, heart

*\*Most companies have until July 26, 2018, to incorporate these changes into their Nutrition Facts Labels.*

disease, certain cancers and other chronic illnesses.

**WHAT'S STILL LACKING:** While serving sizes will now more accurately reflect what people are consuming, these amounts are not necessarily what we *should* be eating. Many people consume supersized portions that are two to five times larger than what they should be, contributing to obesity. I would have loved to have seen a footnote on the new labels clarifying that “the serving size is based upon the amount *typically* consumed but is not a *recommended* portion size.”

**CHANGE #2: A new listing for added sugars.** Food labels have traditionally lumped all sugar together. For example, when you buy vanilla yogurt, you may see “Sugars: 22 g” on the label, but you have no way of knowing how many of those grams are from naturally occurring sugar (such as those found in the milk) and how many were added for flavor. For the first time ever, food manufacturers will be required to disclose *added* sugars on the Nutrition Facts Label. This includes sugars from syrups and honey, as well as white sugar. It does not >>

Bottom Line Health interviewed...

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>> include 100% fruit or vegetable juice concentrate or some sugars found in jams, jellies, preserves and other fruit spreads.

**WHAT'S GOOD:** On average, Americans get about 13% of their total calories from added sugars—think sugary beverages such as soft drinks and juice...and processed cookies and candy. These sugars provide nothing but “empty” calories with no nutritional benefit.

However, naturally occurring sugars in, say, fruit and milk aren't empty because they are found in foods and beverages that also boast beneficial nutrients such as fiber, calcium, vitamins and minerals.

For optimal health, the FDA advises keeping added sugar to no more than 10% of your total daily calories (50 g of added sugar, based on a 2,000-calorie intake, or less).

**WHAT'S STILL LACKING:** I would have liked to have seen the FDA switch from grams to teaspoons. The latter is a more consumer-friendly measurement (most Americans are unfamiliar with the metric system)...plus, teaspoons are easier to visualize. So if you're advised to limit your added sugar intake to 12 teaspoons (which equals 50 g), that seems much more concrete.

**CHANGE #3: New listings for vitamins.** Labels will no longer be required to include amounts of vitamins A and C. They must, however, begin displaying amounts of vitamin D and potassium.

**WHAT'S GOOD:** This change was enacted in response to the growing percentage of Americans who are deficient in vitamin D and potassium. About 40% are deficient in vitamin D, and hardly anyone consumes enough potassium-rich foods. People who don't get enough vitamin D have been shown to be at increased risk for osteoporosis, while those who aren't consuming enough potassium are more likely to develop high blood pressure.

As for vitamins A and C, deficiencies are now rare, but manufacturers can still list these vitamins voluntarily.

**WHAT'S STILL LACKING:** I don't be-

lieve that including vitamin D on food labels will prevent deficiencies. Vitamin D deficiency is common, in part, because this vitamin is found in few foods—except for salmon and fortified milk, for example.

The new labeling may also lead to unnecessary fortification as companies race to add the nutrient to foods in an effort to make them appear healthier. As a result, people taking vitamin D supplements may have trouble regulating their actual vitamin D intake, because few of us eat the same packaged foods every day.

**CHANGE #4: No more “Calories from Fat.”** The scientific community now agrees that the *type* of fat you consume matters more than the amount. That's why “Calories from Fat” will disappear.

**WHAT'S GOOD:** Fat was vilified for so long that people continue to be frightened off by labels that display higher “Calories from Fat”—even if it appears on such nutritional powerhouses as walnuts and olive oil, which contain mainly the unsaturated, heart-healthy kind of fat.

**BEWARE:** Food labels can say a product has “0 g” of trans fats—unhealthy, artificial fats added to processed foods—as long as it contains less than 0.5 g *per serving*. If you consume more than one serving, you may be getting an appreciable amount of trans fats.

As most people now know, we should try to avoid *all* trans fats. These fats—commonly found in crackers, various baked foods, fried foods, etc.—increase risk for heart disease and stroke. To determine whether trans fats are included in a product, check the ingredients list for “partially hydrogenated oils,” the most common alias for trans fats.

**CHANGE #5: A bigger, bolder typeface.** Tired of fumbling with your glasses (or even a magnifying glass) to read the food label? If so, this change should please you.

The calories, serving size and number of servings per container will now be printed in a larger, bolder typeface, so you'll be able to see these crucial items more easily. **BLI**