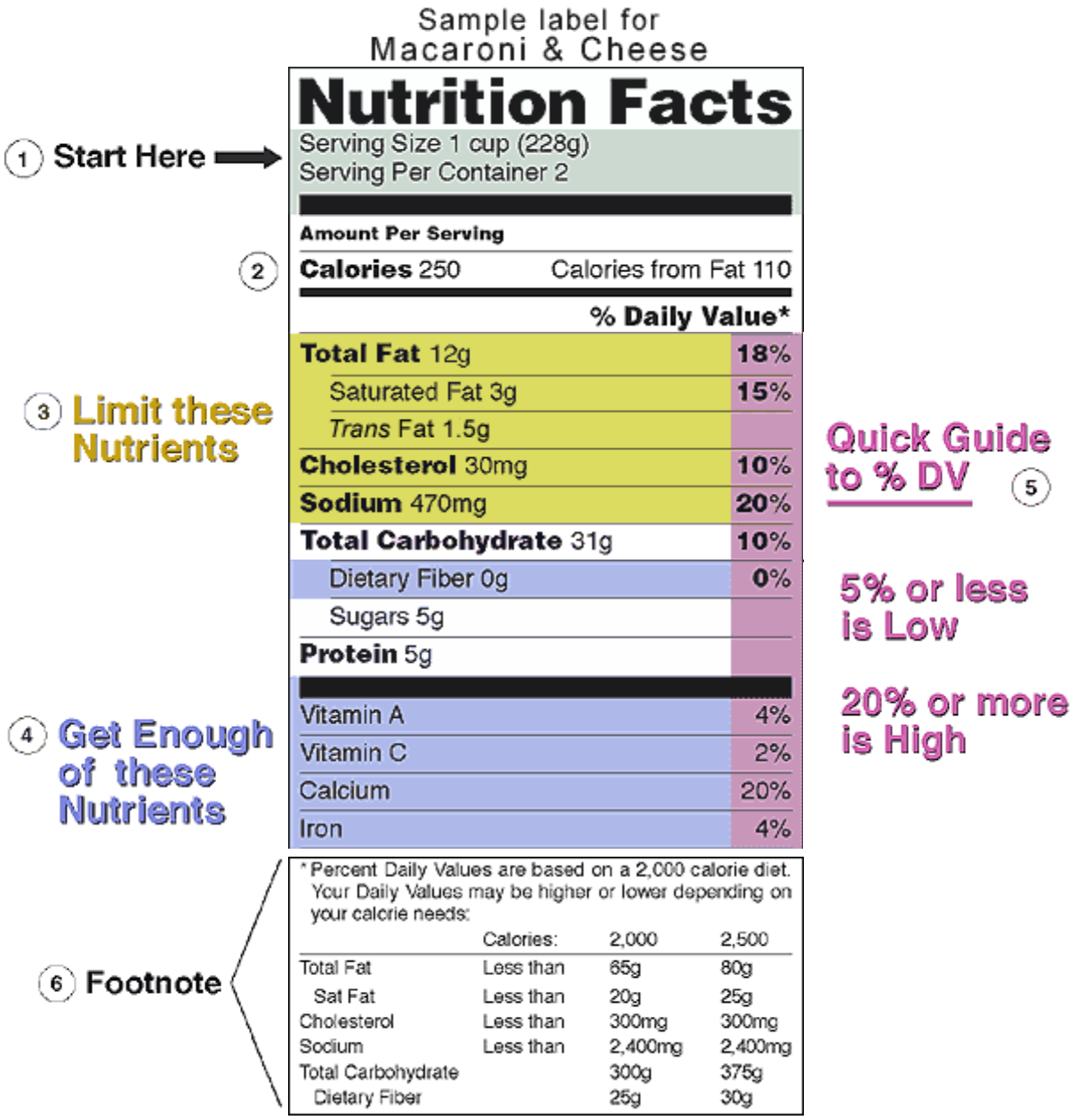
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Department of Health and Human Services
CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY AND APPLIED NUTRITION
June 2000; Updated July 2003

Guidance on How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Panel on Food Labels

People look at food labels for different reasons. But whatever the reason, many consumers would like to know how to use this information more effectively and easily. The following guidance is intended to make it easier for you to use nutrition labels to make quick, informed food choices that contribute to a healthy diet.

The Nutrition Facts panel has two parts:

The main or top section (see #1-5 on the sample nutrition label below), which contains product-specific information (serving size, calories, and nutrient information) that varies with each food product; and the bottom part (see #6 on the sample nutrition label below), which contains a footnote. This footnote is only on larger packages and provides general dietary information about important nutrients.



The Serving Size

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Serving Per Container 2

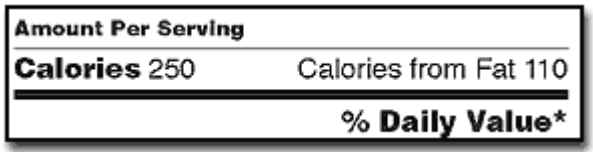
(#1 on sample label):
The first place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts panel is the serving size and the number of servings in the package. Serving sizes are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., the number of grams. Serving sizes are based on the amount of food people typically eat, which makes them realistic and easy to compare to similar foods.

Pay attention to the serving size, including how many servings there are in the food package, and compare it to how much YOU actually eat. The size of the serving on the food package influences all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. In the sample

label above, one serving of macaroni and cheese equals one cup. If you ate the whole package, you would eat two cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers, including the % Daily Values as shown below (see Calories and %Daily Value for more information).

Example					
	Single Serving	**% DV**		**Double Serving**	**% DV**
Serving Size	1 cup (228g)			2 cups (456g)	
Calories	250			500	
Calories from Fat	110			220	
Total Fat	12g	18%		24g	36%
Trans Fat	1.5g			3g	
Saturated Fat	3g	15%		6g	30%
Cholesterol	30mg	10%		60mg	20%
Sodium	470mg	20%		940mg	40%
Total Carbohydrate	31g	10%		62g	20%
Dietary Fiber	0g	0%		0g	0%
Sugars	5g			10g	
Protein	5g			10g	
Vitamin A		4%			8%
Vitamin C		2%			4%
Calcium		20%			40%
Iron		4%			8%

Calories and Calories from Fat



(#2 on sample label):
Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. The label also tells you how many of the calories in one serving come from fat. In the example, there are 250 calories in a serving of this macaroni and cheese. How many *calories from fat* are there in ONE serving? Answer: 110 calories, which means almost half come from fat. What if you ate the whole package content? Then, you would consume two servings, or 500 calories, and 220 would come from fat.

Eating too many calories per day is linked to overweight and obesity.

The Nutrients

(#3 and 4 on sample label):
Look at the top section in the sample nutrition label. It shows nutrients that are important for your health and separates them into two main groups:

Limit These Nutrients

Total Fat 12g	**18%**
Saturated Fat 3g	**15%**
Trans Fat 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30mg	**10%**
Sodium 470mg	**20%**

(#3 on sample label):
The nutrients listed first are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much. They are identified in yellow on the chart as **Limit these Nutrients.** Eating too much fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol, or sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, like heart disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. Eating too many calories is linked to overweight and obesity.

***Note:** Health experts recommend that you keep your intake of saturated fat, *trans* fats and cholesterol as low as possible as part of a nutritionally balanced diet.

Get Enough of These

Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**

Vitamin A	**4%**
Vitamin C	**2%**
Calcium	**20%**
Iron	**4%**

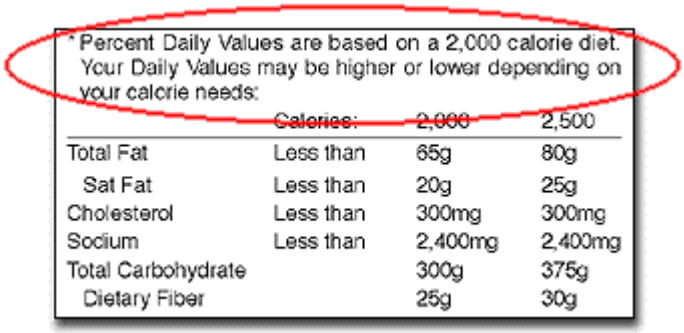
(#4 on sample label):
Americans often don't get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. They are identified in blue on the chart as **Get Enough of these Nutrients**. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions. For example, getting enough calcium can reduce the risk of osteoporosis, in which bones become brittle and break as one ages (see calcium example below).

Remember: You can not only use the food label to help limit those nutrients you want to cut back on, but also to increase those nutrients you want to consume in greater amounts.

The Percent Daily Value (%DV):

This part of the Nutrition Facts panel tells you whether the nutrients (fat, sodium, fiber, etc) in a serving of food contribute a lot or a little to your total daily diet. By diet we mean all the different foods you eat in a day.

%DVs are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet. For labeling purposes, FDA set 2,000 calories as the reference amount for calculating %DVs. The % DV shows you the percent (or how much) of the recommended daily amount of a nutrient is in a serving of food. By using the % DV, you can tell if this amount is high or low. You, like most people, may not know how many calories you consume in a day. But you can still use the %DV as a frame of reference, whether or not you eat more or less than 2,000 calories each day.



* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

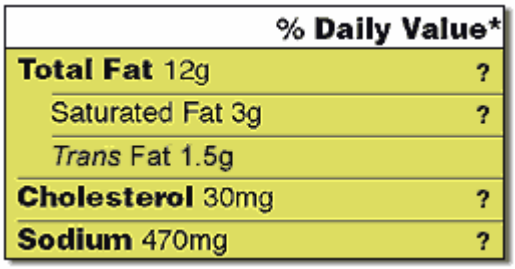
It's not hard to follow nutrition experts' advice for a healthy diet. Try to limit your total daily intake of fat, saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol (shown in yellow on the chart) to **less** than 100%DV.

Likewise, you should try to get enough essential nutrients like calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C as well as other components such as dietary fiber (shown in blue on the chart). Try to average 100% for each one of these nutrients each day.

%DVs are easy to use.

Do you need to know how to calculate percentages to follow this advice? No, the label (the % DV) does the math for you. It helps you interpret the numbers (grams and milligrams) by putting them all on the same scale (0-100%DV), much like a ruler. This way you can tell high from low and know which nutrients contribute a lot, or a little, to your daily recommended allowance (upper or lower).

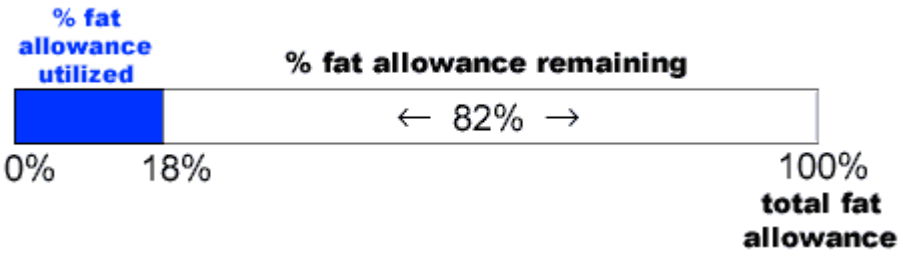
Example of %DV for Total Fat: If you cover up the %DVs on the sample label, can you tell if 12g of Total Fat is high or low? Another way of asking this question is, does one serving (containing 12g of fat) contribute a lot or a little Total Fat to your daily diet?



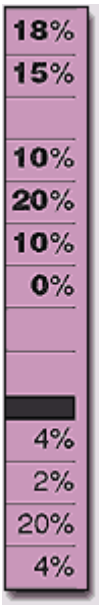
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	?
Saturated Fat 3g	?
Trans Fat 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30mg	?
Sodium 470mg	?

Now look at the %DVs on the label example: 12g fat equals 18%DV. When one serving of macaroni and cheese contains 18%DV for Total Fat, that means you have 82% of your fat allowance left for all the other foods you eat that day (100%-18%=82%).

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%

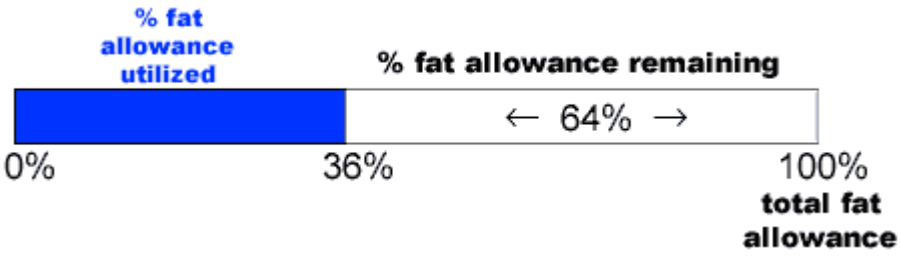


Quick Guide to %DV



(#5 on sample label):
This general guide tells you that 5%DV or less is low and 20%DV or more is high. This means that **5%DV or less is low** for all nutrients, those you want to limit (e.g., fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium), and those that you want to consume in greater amounts (fiber, calcium, etc). As the **Quick Guide** shows, **20%DV or more is high** for all nutrients.

Example: Look again at the amount of Total Fat in one serving listed on the sample nutrition label for macaroni and cheese. Is 18%DV contributing a lot or a little to your maximum fat limit of 100% DV? Check the **Quick Guide to %DV**. You see that 18%DV, which is below 20%DV, is not yet high, but what if you ate the whole package (two servings)? You would double that amount, eating 36% of your daily allowance for Total Fat. That amount, coming from just one food, would contribute a lot of fat to your daily diet. It would leave you 64% of your fat allowance (100%-36%=64%) for *all* of the other foods you eat that day, snacks and drinks included.



Comparisons: The %DV also makes it easy for you to make comparisons. You can compare one product or brand to a similar product. It's easy to see which one is higher or lower in a nutrient because the serving sizes are generally consistent for similar types of foods. See comparison example #1.

Nutrient Content Claims: You can quickly distinguish one claim from another, such as "reduced fat" vs. "light" or "nonfat." Just compare the %DVs for Total Fat in each food product to see which one is higher or lower in that nutrient--**there is no need to memorize definitions.** This works when comparing all nutrient content claims, e.g., less, light, low, free, more, high, etc. See comparison example #1 and #2

Dietary Trade-Offs: You can **use the %DV to help you make dietary trade-offs** with other foods throughout the day. You don't have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. When a food you like is high in fat, balance it with foods that are low in fat at other times of the day. Also, pay attention to how much you eat so that the total amount of fat for the day stays below 100%DV.

Nutrients that Have No %DV: *Trans* Fats, Sugars, and Protein: Note that *Trans* fat, Sugars and, Protein do not list a %DV on the Nutrition Facts panel.

***Trans* Fat**: Scientific reports link *trans* fat (and saturated fat) with raising LDL ("bad") blood cholesterol levels, both of which increase your risk of coronary heart disease, a leading cause of death in the US. But experts could not provide a reference value for *trans* fat nor any other information that FDA believes is sufficient to establish a Daily Value or %DV.

Sugars: No daily reference value has been established because no recommendations have been made for the total amount of sugars to eat in a day. Keep in mind, the sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts panel include naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as those added to a food or drink. Check the ingredient list for specifics on added sugars.

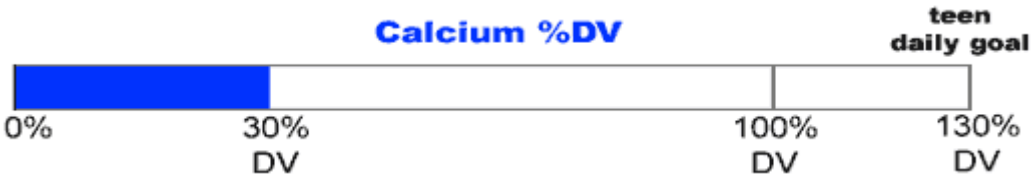
Protein: A %DV is required to be listed if a claim is made for protein, such as "high in protein". Otherwise, unless the food is meant for use by infants and children under 4 years old, none is needed. Current scientific evidence indicates that protein intake is not a public health concern for adults and children over 4 years of age.

To limit nutrients that have no %DV, like *trans* fat and sugars, compare the labels of similar products and choose the food with the lowest amount.

Calcium: Experts advise consumers to consume adequate amounts of calcium in their daily diet. This advice is given in milligrams (mg), but the Nutrition Facts panel only lists a %DV for calcium. For consumers to know how the calcium they consume relates to expert advice, they need to do some simple math. (This applies to calcium only).

Example: Experts advise adolescents, especially girls, to consume 1,300mg and post-menopausal women 1,200mg of calcium daily. To find the %DV that corresponds with 1,300mg and 1,200mg, just divide the number of mg by 10. (The DV for calcium on food labels is 1,000mg). When converted to a percent, this gives a factor of 10. Thus, the daily target for teenage girls, 1,300mg , equals 130%DV, and the daily target for post menopausal women, 1,200mg, equals 120%DV.

If you want to convert the %DV for calcium into milligrams, just multiply by 10. A container of yogurt might list 30%DV for calcium. To convert this to milligrams, multiply by 10, which equals 300mg of calcium for the yogurt.



Equivalencies
30% DV = 300mg calcium = one cup of milk
100% DV = 1,000mg calcium
130% DV = 1,300mg calcium

The important thing is to look at the %DV for calcium on the food package so you know how much one serving contributes to the *total amount you need.* Remember, a food with 20%DV or more contributes a lot of calcium to your daily total, while one with 5%DV or less contributes a little. See Comparison Example #2.

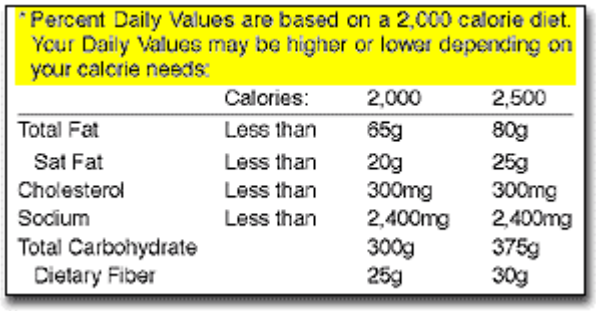
Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1 cup (236ml)
Servings Per Container 1

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 80	Calories from Fat 0
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol Less than 5mg	0%
Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 11g	4%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 11g	
Protein 9g	17%

Vitamin A 10% • Vitamin C 4%
Calcium 30% • Iron 0% • Vitamin D 25%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

The Footnote, or lower part of the Nutrition Facts Panel

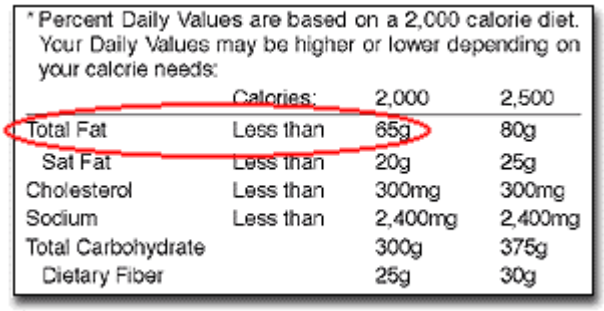


* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

(#6 on sample label)
Note the * used after the heading "%Daily Value" on the Nutrition Facts panel. It refers to the Footnote in the lower part of the nutrition label, which tells you that "**%DVs are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet**". This statement must be on all food labels. But the remaining information in the full footnote may not be on the package if the size of the label is too small. When the full footnote does appear, it will always be the same. It doesn't change from product to product, because it shows dietary advice for all Americans--it is not about a specific food product.

The Daily Values are based on expert dietary advice about how much, or how little, of some key nutrients you should eat each day, depending on whether you eat 2,000 or 2,500 calories a day.



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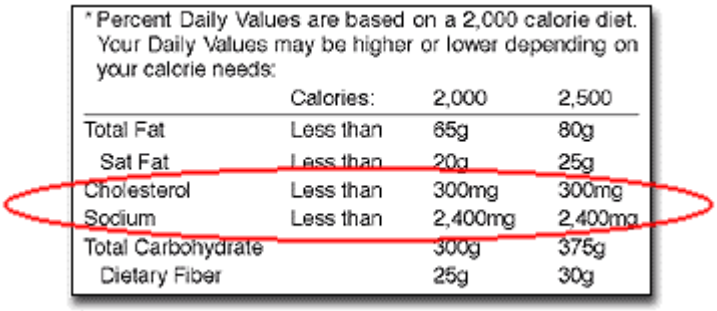
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Example: look at the Total Fat information in the footnote. It tells you that if you eat a 2,000 calorie diet, you should eat *less than 65g of fat in **all** the foods* you eat in a day. By doing this, you will follow nutrition experts' advice to consume no more than 30 percent of your daily calories from fat. Because the DV for total fat is "less than 65g," this is the same thing as saying, to keep your total fat intake for the day below 100%DV.



* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

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Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

If you consume 2,500 calories per day, the Footnote shows you how your daily values would change for some nutrients but not for others. The Daily Values for Cholesterol (300mg) and Sodium (2,400mg sodium) remain the same no matter how many calories you eat. But recommended levels of intake for other nutrients do depend on how many calories you consume.

Remember: %DVs listed on the top half of the food label are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet, not a 2,500 calorie diet.

Comparison Example #1

Below are two kinds of milk- one is "Reduced Fat," the other is chocolate "Nonfat" milk. Each serving size is one cup. Which has more calories? Which is higher in fat and saturated fat?

REDUCED FAT MILK
2% Milkfat

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (236ml)	
Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 120	Calories from Fat 45
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 5g	8%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 20mg	7%
Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 11g	4%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 11g	
Protein 9g	17%
Vitamin A 10% • Vitamin C 4%	
Calcium 30% • Iron 0% • Vitamin D 25%	
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	

CHOCOLATE NONFAT MILK

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (236ml)	
Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 80	Calories from Fat 0
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol Less than 5mg	0%
Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 11g	4%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 11g	
Protein 9g	17%
Vitamin A 10% • Vitamin C 4%	
Calcium 30% • Iron 0% • Vitamin D 25%	
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	

Comparison Example #2

Below are two kinds of milk- one is "Reduced Fat," the other is chocolate "Nonfat" milk. Each serving size is one cup. Which has more calcium?

REDUCED FAT MILK
2% Milkfat

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (236ml)
Servings Per Container 1

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 120	Calories from Fat 45
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 5g	**8%**
Saturated Fat 3g	**15%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 20mg	**7%**
Sodium 120mg	**5%**
Total Carbohydrate 11g	**4%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars 11g	
Protein 9g	**17%**

Vitamin A 10% • Vitamin C 4%
Calcium 30% • Iron 0% • Vitamin D 25%

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CHOCOLATE NONFAT MILK

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (236ml)
Servings Per Container 1

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 80	Calories from Fat 0
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	**0%**
Saturated Fat 0g	**0%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol Less than 5mg	**0%**
Sodium 120mg	**5%**
Total Carbohydrate 11g	**4%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars 11g	
Protein 9g	**17%**

Vitamin A 10% • Vitamin C 4%
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