

Frustration with food labels...



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So do you think interpreting a food label is easy? According to a recent study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine most of us will answer “yes”. However, in truth many find difficulty. For example, when researchers surveyed 200 adults; with 70% having some college, only 32% could correctly calculate carbohydrates consumed in a 20-ounce bottle of soda containing 2 ½ servings.

Since 1994 food manufacturers have been required on most items to display food labels in order to increase awareness of healthier food items. Nutrition facts are displayed to help the purchaser identify specific nutrients; unfortunately, the labeling is not as clear as it may appear.

Areas of concern:

BEWARE-Serving size is often a common area of oversight. Serving size is based on the amount of food people typically eat at a given meal. This may not be the amount that you eat in one sitting. You might just assume the portion size of that item matches your intake and in actuality you be consuming 3 times as many calories. With a measuring tool compare the label with your actual portion size. You might be surprised to actually see the 2 oz of sparse pasta looking like it was remnants of post meal instead of preconsumption. Did you know that one serving size of nuts is equal to a shot glass? Ouch, that is a far cry from the plateful of empty shells sitting next to you post football game. The confusing part is that food items for calorie content and portion size is not equivalent. Did you know one ounce of nuts and one large bowl of air popped popcorn both equal about 200 calories?

Quick quiz. How many portion sizes is a can of soup? Most likely that can is really two portion sizes, not one. You will have to double the calories and other ingredients in order to get your actual intake. When you go down the grocery store isle and spot your favorite crackers only has 70 calories per serving you’ve just might want to look again. The serving size of those crackers might be only 5! Are you going to be just fine with having 5 crackers when you normally consume ½ the box? Plan that your typical 15 cracker serving size will turn into 250 calories worth of empty nutrients in just one quick inhale. A general guideline of calories per serving is that an item that has 40 is low, 100 are moderate and 400 or more is high. Be leery of amount you are getting, though.

On the other hand, you are elated to discover your staple of macaroni and cheese is only 250 calories. Not bad calorically considering a sedentary 65 year old woman only needs 1,600 calories. So what could

be wrong with a little cheese and pasta? Unfortunately, almost ½ the calories coming from saturated fat, 470 mgs of sodium, very little fiber and virtually minimal antioxidants.

A good rule of thumb is for every 100 calories, you want to keep your dietary intake to 3 grams of fat or less. Try also to have sodium labels reduced to 140mg or less per serving. Remember that 1 teaspoon of salt contains 2000 mg of salt.

Food labels can not only help you limit those nutrients you want to cut back in, but increase the nutrients to add to enhance quality. You want to increase the fiber to help health bowel function.

A diet filled with fruits, vegetable, high fiber whole grain products reduce saturated fat, Trans fat, and cholesterol may lower the rates of heart disease. You want to shoot for 25g of fiber a day. A high fiber food item has 5grams or more a serving. The food item must also meet standards for low fat to qualify.

Generally speaking, when you read increased fiber, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, calcium, and iron, you can not go wrong. The trick is to make your calories as nutrient dense as possible. It is not about just decreasing the fat, calories, and sodium.

BEWARE-Even when you read reduced fat or reduced sodium you still might be headed in the wrong direction. No matter what the label says on the front label, the calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, and sugar can still be high because it is in relation to the original item. For example a reduced soup label will have 25% less sodium so the reduced item will still be considered a high sodium item because of the high starting point.

Our countries sweet tooth has definitely increased. Thanks largely to high fructose corn syrup, our sweetener consumption has risen more than 25% to over 4.5 ounces per day. Most food items naturally have sugar. Food items like fruit and milk contain sugar and are not as potentially harmful as additional added sugars. Look under the ingredients list to determine which food labels have sugar closer to the beginning of the list. The items that are first are the more plentiful ones.

BEWARE-Corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, dextrose, sucrose, honey, and maple syrup are all other names for added sugar. When you read total carbohydrates you are getting how many grams of natural and added sugar in 1 serving. Carbohydrates help make up calories so if calories are low there is a good chance carbohydrate will be low as well. The sugar heading under the carbohydrate section explains how many additional grams of added sugar there are. For quick rule of thumb, I recommend 10 grams of sugar or less with boxed cereals.

Mind you, with the packaging industry being worth over 10 million dollars, this business is worth no small potatoes. Heed warning, the industry has much more invested interests in your wallets and not your waste line.

When shopping at the grocery store I have much less reservations over the spuds; whereas, my true concerns are with all the added gravy!

In Good Health,

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