

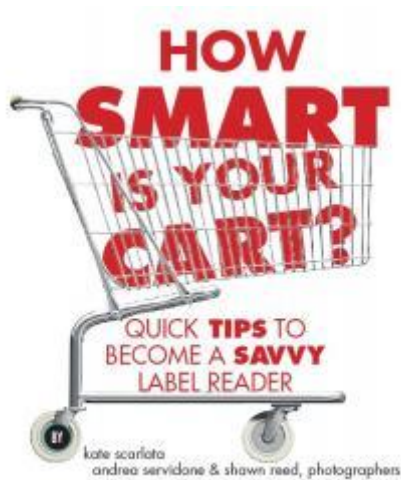
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## HOW SMART IS YOUR CART?

### QUICK TIPS TO BECOME A SAVVY LABEL READER

by Kate Scarlata / Andrea Servidone & Shawn Reed, photographers

Ever feel like shopping at the grocery store requires a PhD in nutritional science?



Moreover, food manufacturers seem to enjoy bamboozling us into thinking their products are chock full of good nutrition.

The nutrition facts label is a good starting point for checking the overall nutrient content of the food you are about to purchase for your family, but take a peek at the ingredient list as well to see what additives, artificial colors, hidden trans fats and salt may be lurking in the product.

### How to become a food label detective

- Always observe the serving size and be sure you calculate the nutrition facts based on the amount you intend to eat. For instance, a 16-ounce Very Fine apple juice contains two servings—not one! If you drink the entire bottle, double the calories, sugar etc. noted on the label.
- Minimize intake of fat as it is a big source of calories. The American Heart Association recommends that 30% or less of your calories come from fat to keep the heart healthy. Based on a 1,800 calorie diet, that would be 60 grams of fat per day.
- Be sure your food choices contain zero grams of trans fats. Even if the nutrition facts label states a food contains “0 g” of trans fat, be careful if the ingredient list includes “partially hydrogenated oils.” This means that the product does indeed contain trans fats. Food manufacturers are allowed to claim a food item has “0 g” of trans fats if it contains 0.5 grams of trans fat or less per serving. The American Heart Association recommends intake of trans fats to be less than 1% of total calories or 2 grams per day (0-1 grams for little children). So take that

extra step and look at the ingredients! Of all fats, trans fats are the worst fats as they clog arteries the most!

- Cholesterol intake should be less than 300 milligrams per day. Choose foods with minimal cholesterol to keep your heart healthy. Animal products contain cholesterol; plant foods do not.
- Sodium is added for flavor and preserving of our foods. A low sodium food choice contains 120 milligrams or less of sodium and a high sodium food item contains greater than 480 milligrams. Why do we care? A high sodium diet is linked with high blood pressure.
- Total carbohydrates on the food label denote complex carbohydrates such as whole grains as well as added sugars. Carbs provide our body with energy so the more active you are, the more you need. According to the Institute of Medicine, adults should get 45 percent to 65 percent of their calories from carbohydrates. Per 1,800 calories that translates to 202 - 293 grams of carbohydrate per day.
- Fiber falls under the total carbohydrate heading. Fiber is an indigestible carbohydrate that helps keep us satiated, maintains the health and movement of our digestive tract, lowers cholesterol and regulates the sugar in our bloodstream. The recommended intake for total fiber for adults ranges between 25-35 grams per day. Experts recommend children older than 2 years old consume 5 grams of fiber plus their age, so a 3-year-old should consume about 8 grams of fiber per day. A good goal is to choose bread and cereals with at least 3 grams of fiber per serving.
- Sugar is difficult to assess on a food label as the label does not distinguish between added sugars compared with natural sugar in the product. For instance a plain yogurt without added sugar has 10 grams of sugar represented on the food label. This sugar is the naturally occurring milk sugar, lactose, not *added* sugar. The American Heart Association recommends most women should limit their sugar intake to 100 calories, or about six teaspoons, a day; for men, the recommendation is 150 calories, or nine teaspoons per day. If you are concerned about your intake of sugars, make sure that added sugars are not listed as one of the first few ingredients. Ingredients are listed in order of prevalence in a product. Beware of sugar disguises including: corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, dextrose, sucrose, honey and maple syrup.
- Protein intake should be about 10-35% of calories. Most Americans consume plenty of protein. Good sources include: meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, tofu, yogurt, peanut butter, nut butters, cheese and milk.
- % DV (daily value) stands for the percentage of a certain nutrient in the product compared to the amount recommended based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Any nutrient that has 5% DV or less is low in that nutrient where as 20% DV indicates that the product is a good source of that nutrient.

## Take a closer look at the labels of family-favorite food items

### Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup



For starters, take a peek at the serving size. A measly  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup is the serving, with 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  servings in the can. Hmm...I don't think so! Although this soup's directions tell you to add a can of water, I find most people don't add any and consume the whole can. Note the sodium on this label, 890 milligrams per serving, yet indulging in the entire can, the sodium intake would be 2,225 milligrams! Most experts are now recommending daily intake for most adults should not exceed 1,500 milligrams, the equivalent of about two-thirds of a teaspoon of table salt per day. Food items containing greater than 20% DV for sodium are considered high in sodium; this label notes sodium intake is 37% DV, just in  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cup!

### Newman's Own Marinara Pasta Sauce



For a "package sauce" this tomato sauce is a bit high in salt, note the DV% is 21. But, what I like about this sauce is that the ingredient list contains recognizable ingredients. The only slightly unusual ingredient is citric acid, which according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), an advocacy group that utilizes scientific evidence to educate the public and promotes government policies to improve public health, is a safe and widely-used ingredient. For a lower sodium sauce make a fresh sauce with fresh chopped tomatoes, garlic, fresh, chopped basil and just a dash of salt—yum!

### Kraft Light Catalina Reduced Fat Dressing



This sweet dressing is low in fat, but has the equivalent of about 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons of sugar in the 2 Tablespoon serving size. Artificial color, red 40, sneaks in too, along with a few preservatives. According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, red 40 can cause allergic-like reactions. For a healthier dye-free alternative with less sugar, try Newman's Own Balsamic Vinaigrette Dressing.

### Old El Paso Taco Dinner Kit



Let's start with the taco shells, which have TBHQ, added as a preservative. What the heck is that? TBHQ stands for tertiary butyl hydroquinone, a preservative added to foods to extend shelf life. BHA, BHT and TBHQ are all added preservatives and some experts feel all of them may be linked with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The taco seasoning mix in this dinner “kit” boasts even more preservatives, monosodium glutamate, partially hydrogenated fats (trans fats) and includes salt as the second ingredient. An easy and healthier option is to make your own seasoning mix, add 1 ½ Tablespoons chili powder, 1 ½ teaspoon cumin, 1 tsp. onion powder, 1 tsp. garlic powder, 1 tsp. paprika, and a dash of salt and pepper to a pound of your favorite lean ground beef, chicken or turkey breast. And your kids (and their growing bodies) will say, “muchas gracias!”

### Skippy All Natural Peanut Butter



Unlike many commercial brands of peanut butter, this one does not contain any partially hydrogenated oils, A.K.A., trans fats, the most deleterious to your arteries. There is a bit of added sugar and salt but the quantities are not over the top, making this a kid-friendly favorite. The all natural peanut butters without added sugar, salt or fats such as Smucker’s Natural No Added Salt Peanut Butter is a notch healthier, with only one ingredient: peanuts. Well, that makes label reading easier, doesn’t it?

In general, don’t be fooled by the term natural, which is barely regulated in this country. Bruce Silverglade Director of Legal Affairs at CSPI, notes, “the Food and Drug Administration has no official regulations defining the term ‘natural’ - it can be slapped on almost any food the FDA regulates and the agency has no plans to issue official rules for the term ‘natural.’” Even products made with high fructose corn syrup can bear the label “all natural” which we all know is a far cry from nature.

### Quaker Instant Oatmeal



The label boasts natural and artificial flavors! Why should your morning cereal be artificial anything? The second ingredient in this food item is sugar, as ingredients are listed in order of prevalence in a product. This item boasts a bit too much sweetness. On the upside, the product contains 3 grams of fiber. Most Americans fall short in their fiber quota, so any cereal with 3 grams or more is a great start to the day. How about trying a bowl of quick oats topped with a tsp. of brown sugar and fresh berries or ½ sliced banana. That would make a healthier breakfast bowl without artificial flavors, caramel color or artificial flavor!

Try your best to choose foods with recognizable ingredients. If you fill your cart with more foods found in nature versus those in a bag or box, you will be well on your way to having a smart cart.

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