

## Nutrition Labels

**Main objectives:** To teach the class how to read and understand a nutrition facts label and use the various components to judge the nutritional value of a food.

### Essential Discussion Topics:

- *What is a nutrition facts label?* Ask the class what they know about food labels. Have they ever looked at the labels before? What are the different components? What do they mean? Why is it important to read the labels?
- *Major components of the nutrition facts label.* Hand out empty boxes of food to each student so they can follow along during the discussion. Discuss what the different components of the food label represent. Ask the class to share what they find on their boxes. What foods are better, and in which categories? Why are they better?
  - **Serving Size and Number of Servings.** Nutrition Label information is based on the amount per one serving, but many items contain multiple servings. Make sure to consider the number of servings you are consuming when looking at the fat, calories, nutrients, etc. (Recall serving size discussion from Healthy Eating Plate Lesson.)
  - **Calories.** In general, we do not wish to overemphasize the idea of calories. We are not trying to encourage the students to count calories. Rather, we want to emphasize the idea of Energy In vs. Energy Out and the importance of living a healthy, active lifestyle. (Recall Energy In, Energy Out Lesson.)
  - **Fats.** The Total Fat is broken down into saturated fat, unsaturated fat and trans fat. Try to select foods that are low in unhealthy fats (saturated and trans fats). Note that Trans Fat does not have a %DV because the goal is to consume as little as possible. Avoiding unhealthy fats and cholesterol is important for your cardiovascular health. (Recall Fat Lesson.)
  - **Sodium.** Most Americans get plenty of sodium. Too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure.
  - **Carbohydrates.** The Total Carbohydrate is broken down into dietary fiber and sugars. Fiber is good for our bodies because it keeps us fuller longer, helps our digestive system work properly and is good for your heart and vessels. Look for foods with more fiber. Try to limit foods with added sugar. The AHA recommends an added sugar limit of 24-36 grams per day. To find whole grains, look at the ingredient list. (Recall Whole Grain Lesson and Sugar Lesson.)
  - **Protein.** Most Americans get plenty of protein.
  - **Vitamins/Minerals.** Underneath the main food label, the amounts of various nutrients included in the product are listed. Nutrition labels can be used to limit fat and sodium, but are also important to increase nutrients that are healthy – such as vitamins, calcium, iron. (Recall Fruits and Vegetables Lesson and Calcium Lesson.)
- *% Daily Value.* The percentages listed on the far right represent how much of the total amount the FDA recommends of each component we should eat each day per serving. These numbers can be a good guide to let you know the relative amounts in each serving, but are somewhat difficult to follow. This is something that should be discussed as a concept, but it probably wouldn't be advisable to try and use this every day.

- *Ingredients.* The ingredient list is one of the best places to judge the nutritional value of a food. Ingredients are listed in order from the greatest to least amount included in the product. The ingredient list, unlike many other places on the box, cannot list any sort of false or deceptive information (more on this later). For this reason, it's a good place to make sure the food doesn't contain trans fats (listed as 'hydrogenated oil' or often shortening) and does contain whole grains (whole grain wheat, oats, etc. should be listed explicitly). Fortified grains are generally refined grains (like white flour) with vitamins added – that's why a food like cereal can contain a large amount of vitamins, but be made of the less healthy refined grains.

#### Supplemental Discussion Topics:

- *Health Claims.* Health claims are the various descriptions listed on package that are not part of the food label. These can often be deceptive and hard to interpret. A list of different food claims is given below. As an example, 'multigrain' is often written to imply healthier grains, but does not guarantee whole grains are used (simply more than one grain is in the product). Low-fat and non-fat are other claims that do not guarantee a healthy product – they may still be very high in sugar, refined grains, or sodium.

#### Activities:

- *Choose the best nutrition facts label.* Have the class get into groups of 3-4 and share what is listed on their box. Share what they think are the healthy aspects and the not so healthy aspects of their item.
  - Have each group find a health claim on one of their items and discuss what it means. Use the food label as a guide.
  - Have each group choose the item that they think is the healthiest and present it to the class.

#### Food Activities:

- Have students create their own nutrition label (on a poster or large sheet of paper) as the homemade hummus is prepared (below). Have them start with the ingredient list. Then discuss each component. Obviously, it won't be exact but you can discuss whether the class thinks there's trans fat, certain vitamins, etc. based on the ingredients used. Show class the created nutrition facts label (below).

#### Snack Ideas:

- *Homemade hummus and pita.* In a food processor, puree chickpeas (1 15-ounce can drained and rinsed), garlic (1 clove), olive oil (1/4 cup), lemon juice (2 Tbsp), tahini (2 Tbsp), cumin (1 tsp), salt (1/4 tsp) until smooth and creamy. Add 1-2 Tbsp water as necessary to achieve desired consistency. Serve with whole grain pita wedges.

## Homemade Hummus Nutrition Facts Label

Nutrition Facts			
<b>Serving Size: 2 Tbsp</b>		Vitamin A	0.2 %
<b>Servings Per Container: 12</b>		Vitamin B-12	0.0 %
Amount Per Serving		Vitamin B-6	7.5 %
<b>Calories</b>	91.4	Vitamin C	4.0 %
<b>Total Fat</b>	6.2 g	Vitamin D	0.0 %
Saturated Fat	0.8 g	Vitamin E	3.1 %
Polyunsaturated Fat	1.1 g	Calcium	2.1 %
Monounsaturated Fat	3.9 g	Copper	4.7 %
<b>Cholesterol</b>	0.0 mg	Folate	5.7 %
<b>Sodium</b>	141.1 mg	Iron	3.6 %
<b>Potassium</b>	66.1 mg	Magnesium	2.8 %
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b>	7.6 g	Manganese	11.1 %
Dietary Fiber	1.6 g	Niacin	0.9 %
Sugars	0.1 g	Pantothenic Acid	1.1 %
<b>Protein</b>	1.9 g	Phosphorus	4.6 %
		Riboflavin	1.3 %
		Selenium	1.3 %
		Thiamin	2.7 %
		Zinc	2.9 %

## Supplemental Materials:

### **Health Claims List**

FAT FREE - The product has less than .5 grams of fat per serving

LOW FAT - The product has 3 grams or less of fat per serving

REDUCED or LESS FAT - The product has at least 25% less fat per serving than the full-fat version

LITE or LIGHT - This one is ambiguous and can have a number of meanings:

- the product has fewer calories or half the fat of the non-light version,

- the sodium content of a low-calorie, low-fat food is 50 percent less than the non-light version,

- a food is clearer in color (like light instead of dark corn syrup).

CALORIE FREE - The product has less than 5 calories per serving

LOW CALORIE - The product has 40 calories or less per serving

REDUCED or FEWER CALORIES - The product has at least 25 percent fewer calories per serving than the non-reduced version.

### Front Label Trickery

“Fortified”, “enriched”, “added”, “extra”, and “plus” usually mean the food has been altered or processed in some way.

“Fruit drinks” usually means little or no real fruit and a lot of sugar. Instead look for products that say “100% fruit juice”.

“Made with wheat,” or “rye,” or “multi-grains” imply that it’s a good source of whole grains, but unfortunately, don’t tell you how much whole grain is actually in the product. Look for the word “whole” before the grain to ensure that you are actually getting a 100% whole-grain product.

“Natural” or “made from natural” simply means the manufacturer started with a natural source. Once processed, the food may not resemble anything “natural.”

“Organically grown,” “organic,” “pesticide-free,” and “no artificial ingredients” say very little about the nutritional value or safety of the product. Trust only those labels that say “certified organically grown.”

“Sugar-free,” “sugarless,” or “no added sugar” tells you nothing about sugar derivatives or sugar substitutes, which yield just as many calories as table sugar and may be more harmful to you than sugar