

# Living with Heart Failure: Reading Nutrition Labels

When trying to make healthy food choices to control your heart failure, what you eat has a big impact on how you feel and your symptoms.

Fortunately, you can get lots of information about the foods you're eating from the Nutrition Facts panel.

This nutrition label is on every canned, processed, or packaged food and lists the ingredients and levels of different nutrients.

For heart failure patients, the two most important items on the nutrition label are serving size and sodium content. The serving size helps you decide what portion you can have based on how much sodium is in that food.

And having too much sodium in your diet can greatly affect how you feel and the amount of fluid your body retains.

Overall, the American Heart Association recommends limiting your total sodium to about 1,500 mg a day. Your healthcare team will discuss with you the amount of sodium you are allowed per day.

The nutrition label makes it much easier to keep track of how much sodium you're consuming.

*"We recommend for patients to check nutrition labels, choosing food items that are no more than 140 milligrams of sodium or less per serving."*

Pay attention to food packages that are marked as salt or sodium free, low sodium or no salt added. In most cases, the sodium content is lower, but you still need to read the label to see how much sodium it does contain.

*"I think one of the things that I really had to adjust to was just looking at labels because I was one of those folks that I liked eating stuff like pasta. You know, I was a big pasta fan, or, you know. So, I realized that, you know, the sauces have a lot of, you know, sodium in them."*

Food labels also list the fat and cholesterol content.

By law, food manufacturers have to include the levels of saturated and trans fats on the label. These are unhealthy fats that are bad for your heart.

Cholesterol is also listed on the label. Talk to your healthcare provider about how much cholesterol you should be eating.

Also look for how much potassium is in each food because some heart failure medications may affect your potassium level, especially diuretics.

Your healthcare team can help you understand how much potassium you should eat each day or if you need to limit it.

Fiber is also listed on the label. Fiber is good for your heart, so look for foods that are high in fiber. This includes whole grain products, like whole grain cereals and bread.

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Other key words to look for on food packaging that can indicate that the food may be high in sodium, saturated and trans fats and cholesterol are: creamy, fried, sautéed, crispy, and au gratin.

If you have questions about certain foods or what to look for, meet with your healthcare provider. She can give you more tips on what to look for on the label.

Learn to use the food label in order to choose heart healthy foods every day.