

Reading the Food Label When You Have Diabetes

Shopping for food can be a little intimidating, especially with all the choices.

With all those food choices in front of you, how do you make a healthy choice for good diabetes management?

One of the most valuable tools, when trying to choose what food to buy, is the Nutrition Facts food label located on all pre-packaged products.

The food label has a lot of information, including serving size, calories, types of fat, carbohydrate and fiber. Once you get the hang of it, it's easy to use and understand.

Let's start with the serving size. All information on the nutrition facts label is based on the serving size, which is listed in grams on the label.

For example: one slice of wheat bread, 8 ounces of milk, 1/2 cup of cooked rice, 1 tablespoon of olive oil or 2 taco shells.

Compare this serving size to what you actually eat. For example: if you eat a half serving, cut all the figures in half to see how much of each nutrient you're getting.

"It was really surprising looking at the labels to see number one, what is considered a portion size, and I think a lot of people would be shocked."

The food label shows you how many calories are in that food serving. If you are trying to limit the number of calories you eat, this information can help.

When you have diabetes, you should be aware of how much carbohydrate you eat because it raises your blood glucose faster than other types of food.

Take a look at the Total Carbohydrate on the food label. Use the Total Carbohydrate information to help make a food choice that will keep your blood glucose in a healthy range.

And even if a product is labeled sugar free that doesn't mean its carbohydrate free. So, make sure to read the food label.

"Pastas, that's one thing high in carbs so I'm trying different brands of pastas and I'll look at the carb label-- or I should say the food label and see how many carbs for how many servings you can have."

Look at the fiber content as well because foods that contain fiber provide you with many nutritional benefits, such as slowing the rate that glucose is absorbed in the body. Aim for 25 to 35 grams of fiber everyday.

Having diabetes puts you at an increased risk of heart disease so take a look at the total fat, saturated fat per serving. Saturated fats are the kinds that increase your risk of heart disease, so everyone should eat less.

Information on cholesterol, sodium and protein are also included and may be helpful in controlling your blood cholesterol, blood pressure, and weight.

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“Have to watch it with diabetes. Got to watch carbs and sugar. So that label is very important to me. So I’m not only reading the sodium label, I’m also reading the sugars, and the carbs.”

Keep in mind that the percentages given are based on someone who needs 2000 calories a day and doesn’t have diabetes.

Using the left side of the food label maybe more useful for you. Talk to your diabetes care team about how many calories you should eat each day.

When making healthy food choices in the grocery store, read the food label. With a little time and effort, using this tool can make a big difference in your diabetes health management.