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LABEL READING TIPS AND TRICKS

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For many people, the information found on food labels can feel like a foreign language. What do all of those words and numbers actually mean, and how can you make the best decisions when trying to feed your family? Understanding the nutrition facts label is an essential part of taking charge of your health, so give these tips and tricks a try the next time you are at the grocery store.

Watch the Serving Size

The serving size is often less than you might think, which means you are probably eating more than you planned. For some products this may be obvious, but for others it isn't so clear. Paying attention to serving size is especially important if you are using the nutrition facts label to help you count calories or grams of a specific macronutrient, like protein or carbohydrate.

Focus on Sugar

Sugar can be one of the most confusing aspects of the nutrition label. Should you be looking at total carbohydrates or sugars? And what about fiber? A good rule of thumb is to compare the grams of sugar to the total grams of carbohydrates. The higher the amount of "sugar", the more processed sugar has been added to the product. Choosing foods with less than 5 grams of sugar is ideal.

Don't be Fooled by Buzzwords

"Buzzwords" include phrases such as organic, multigrain, fiber and natural. Food manufacturers know consumers have heard these words and often associate them with health. By using such terms to promote their product, companies feel confident they can sell their product to health conscious shoppers.

It is essential; however, to review all the information contained in the ingredient list and within the food label. Whole wheat bread, for example, is only a true whole grain product if "whole wheat flour" is the first ingredient found in the ingredient list. Low-fat and sugar-free products are popular, but often times the fat has been replaced with sugar, and the sugar-free options are filled with artificial sweeteners.

Using nutrition labels to make nutrition decisions is important, but eating a wide variety of fresh foods is best. Try your best to reduce packaged and processed food choices, while focusing increasing your intake of healthful foods like fresh produce, meats, dairy and whole grains.



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Easy Minestrone Soup

Source: www.twopeasandtheirpod.com

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 medium zucchini, diced
- 1 cup fresh or frozen green beans
- 2 (14 ounce) cans diced tomatoes
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 1 (14 ounce) can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup whole wheat elbow macaroni (can use gluten-free pasta)
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- Parmesan cheese—optional, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

Heat olive oil in a large stockpot. Add onion, garlic, carrot, and celery. Cook for about 5 minutes, or until lightly browned. Add in zucchini, green beans, and diced tomatoes. Stir in vegetable broth, beans, pasta, basil, oregano, and thyme. Simmer until vegetables and macaroni are tender, about 35 minutes.

Season soup with salt and pepper and serve warm. Garnish with Parmesan cheese, if desired.