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Reading Food Labels

Food Labels can be Deceptive

Did you ever pick up a product and quickly look at the label for the calorie, fat or other content and think it's not so bad? Look closer. Oftentimes, there are facts that are not obvious. There are pitfalls on the labels, so here are just a few tips to be aware of; they are my pet peeves. For a more complete look at how to read a food label, the FDA website has a great guide [FDA Food Label Guide](#) and I provided links to more information.

- **Serving size**
Serving size is a much smaller portion than what you would normally eat making the calorie content anywhere from double to quadruple.
- **Counting Carbohydrate, Fat etc**
On a food label, zero isn't necessarily zero and one isn't necessarily one. The numbers of grams are rounded up or down. For example, when counting grams of carbohydrate, **less than** half a gram can be listed as zero, and anything greater than a gram is rounded to the nearest gram. So one gram of carbohydrate could be anything from .51 grams to 1.49 grams. If your serving size is 4 times what's listed (and it usually is), you think you are eating 4 grams of carbohydrates, however with the round up rules, you may actually be eating 5.96 or almost 6 grams. Beware! The same is true of all of the other ingredients. [FDA Roundup Rules](#)
- **No trans fats**
Under FDA regulations, "if the serving contains less than 0.5 gram [of trans fat], the content, when declared, shall be expressed as zero." Suppose you eat one serving of 3 different products and each contains 0.4 grams per serving. You have just consumed 1.2 grams of trans fat, despite the fact that each of the labels claims that the products contain zero grams of trans fat per serving! If the words "partially hydrogenated" or "shortening" which is partially hydrogenated oil, appear in the ingredients, the product contains trans fat.
- **All Natural**
Poison mushrooms are all natural and so are marijuana and heavy metals, however you wouldn't want to eat these. This term has no value. I like this article on some of the commonly used terms on food labels such as Organic, Cage Free, Free Range and more. [Deconstructing Food Labels](#)

So what should we eat?

"Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." — Michael Pollan