

Health Claims on Food Labels



Food makers can make health claims about certain nutrients, such as calcium, fiber, and fat, that are found naturally in foods. The health claims must be balanced and based on current, reliable scientific studies and must be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Health claims may be statements like "This food is a good source of calcium. Adequate intake of calcium may reduce the risk of osteoporosis," or "Development of cancer depends on many factors. A diet low in total fat may reduce the risk of some cancers."

But just because a food label has a health claim does not mean that the food is healthy for you. For example, a food that is labeled as "a good source of calcium" may still be high in fat, salt, or sugar.

Terms you can trust

Terms on labels are legally defined for food companies. Phrases such as "low-fat," "low-sodium," "light" or "lite," "free" (as in "fat-free"), and "[organic](#)" are now standardized for all foods. If a food uses one of these terms, you can trust that it meets the criteria for that term.

Per serving:

- Calorie-free: Less than 5 calories
- Fat-free or sugar-free: Less than ½ gram of fat or sugar
- Good source of: At least 10% of the Daily Value of the vitamin or nutrient
- High in: Provides 20% or more of the Daily Value (DV) of a nutrient
- High fiber: 5 or more grams of fiber
- Lean: 10 grams of fat or less, 4.5 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 mg of cholesterol in a 3-ounce serving of meat, poultry, or seafood
- Light: 1/3 less calories or 1/2 the fat
- Low-calorie: Less than 40 calories
- Low-fat: 3 grams or less of fat
- Low cholesterol: Less than 20 milligrams of cholesterol and 2 grams or less of saturated fat
- Low sodium: Less than 140 milligrams of sodium

Credits

Current as of: August 21, 2019

Author: Healthwise Staff

Medical Review: Kathleen Romito, MD - Family Medicine; Rhonda O'Brien, MS, RD, CDE - Certified Diabetes Educator