

## **Lesson 1.4: Read the Labels**

### **Background (Read before you teach):**

The Nutrition Facts Label shows specific information for foods and beverages to help consumers make choices leading to healthier diets (Food and Drug Administration [FDA], 2017a). Improvements in the Nutrition Facts Label are coming soon (FDA, 2017b). For example, consumers will be able to compare items based on more realistic portion sizes and see more clearly how much sugar is added to the product.

Research has found that Latinas with greater nutrition knowledge are more likely to use the Nutrition Facts Labels and choose foods lower in fat, added sugar, and sodium and higher in fiber (Fitzgerald, Damio, Segura-Pérez, & Pérez-Escamilla, 2008), Pérez-Escamilla & Haldeman, 2002). However, nutrition education needs to include hands-on activities and check-back for understanding. One study found that even though Latinas are familiar with food labels, few are actually reading labels to make food choices (Pérez-Escamilla et al., 2011). Among Latino adults in Los Angeles, 60% reported using the Nutrition Facts label but only 13% of those individuals were able to correctly identify information on the label (Sharif et al., 2014). More information on reading labels is especially needed among males, older Latinos, and those with less than a high school education.

**Teaching Tip:** This lesson reinforces messages taught in the “Shop with a List”. Encourage parents to teach their school-age children to look at the Nutrition Facts Label and find out how much sugar, saturated fat, sodium or fiber is in their favorite snack foods or cereals.

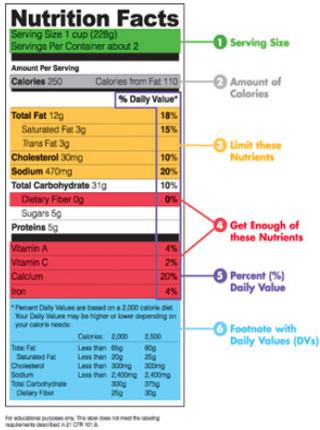


Figure 1. How to read Nutrition Facts label.

Proposed changes in the Nutrition Facts label (not yet implemented) will make it easier for people to see how many calories are in a serving.<sup>2</sup> Also, people will be able to compare the amount of sugar added to the food or beverage during processing. When the new label is released, educators can alert participants to look for and limit added sugars in their diets.



Figure 2. Changes in nutrition facts label.

**Target Audience:** Mexican-origin families with young children, ages 3 to 8 years

**Key Message:** Use the Nutrition Facts label to make good food choices.

**Objectives:** By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Compare the amount of calories and other components (saturated fat, sodium, added sugar, and fiber) listed on food labels of similar types of foods and
- Use the Nutrition Facts label to identify which nutrients to limit (total fat, saturated fat, sodium) and which nutrients to increase (dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals).

**Materials:**

- Poster with Nutrition Fact Label;
- Several different food labels from cereal boxes, yogurt containers and snack foods like crackers (choose a few items that have the same portion size for the activity);
- White board or poster paper and markers; and
- Supplies and recipes for the food demonstration (suggested Apple-glazed Sweet Potatoes)

**Handouts:** Recipes, “The Nutrition Facts Label. Look for it and use it”. (see References and Resources below)

**Set-up:** Prepare a large poster or set up a projector to display a Nutrition Facts Label. Make copies of food labels to group activity.

**Opening (Anchor):** (10 min) Overview: Welcome!

Review what was covered last time and ask if families have made changes, based on their goals. Congratulate and encourage them to keep on trying.

Say: Today we will be talking about how to use the Nutrition Facts label on food packages to make healthy food choices.

Begin the discussion with an open-ended question. Choose one of the following:

- **Ask:** When you are in the store, how do you make decisions about which foods to buy? (Listen to see if anyone mentions reading labels on the package) or
- Show the Nutrition Facts label and **Ask:** Does anyone read the food label? What do you look for on the label? (Use this question to assess what participants already know)

**Lesson (Add):** (15 min) Discuss the following points:

- **Ask:** Why should you bother reading the label? Why is it important to you and your family?  
Some possible answers:
  - Get more vitamins and minerals to stay healthy
  - Watch amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight
  - Help family members follow a special diet that their doctor has recommended
- **Summarize:** Making healthy choices in a US supermarket can be very confusing. There are a lot of food ads. Your children may also ask you to buy a new food advertised on TV. Reading the food label gives you information to use right away to compare different foods and choose the healthier option for your family.
- (Show the poster and point out to the class sections of the label). Lead a discussion as you review the label, selecting a few points). **Say:** Let's look more closely at a label.
  - What is the size of a serving and how many does the package contain?
  - How many calories are in a serving of the food (as prepared)? Since there are X servings in the package, how many calories would you eat if you ate the whole package?
  - How many grams of saturated fat are there in a serving? Milligrams of sodium? Note: these are some nutrients that we need to limit to lower risk of cardiovascular disease. A healthier food choice would be lower in these nutrients.
  - How many grams of added sugar are there in a serving? Sugars added to sweeten processed foods and beverages increase calories without adding important nutrients. A healthier food choice is lower in added sugar.
  - How many grams of fiber are there in a serving? Many people do not get enough fiber. A healthier food choice would be higher in fiber.
- **Summarize:** There is a lot more to learn from the label than we can cover today. You can use the label to compare different foods and select the healthiest choice. For example, healthy choices provide less saturated fat and sodium and more fiber. Watching calories and choosing a healthy diet pattern can help maintain a healthy weight. It can also reduce your risk of developing heart problems, diabetes and other cardiovascular diseases. Dietary fiber is important for intestinal health and can reduce the risk of some cancers.

**Activity (Apply):** (25 min) While the assistant sets-up the food demonstration, the educator distributes the food label handouts to participants. Give at least two different food labels to each group (cereal A and B or snack food A and B).

- Ask each group to read the labels and circle calories per serving and amounts of saturated fat, sodium, sugar, and/or dietary fiber.
- Invite the groups to share what they have learned, discussing cereal, yogurt and snack food choices separately. You may use the poster paper or white board to compare the labels. For example:

	Calories	Saturated fat	Sodium
Snack food A			
Snack food B			

	Calories	Sugar	Fiber
Cereal A			
Cereal B			

**Ask:** if you ate the entire package, how many calories would that be? Which is a better choice?

- Food demonstration, tasting and sharing. Pass around the containers, showing the participants any foods that might be new or unfamiliar (for example, low-fat products, whole grain alternatives). Use this opportunity to ask about saturated fat, sodium, fiber, and/or added sugar in the foods. Explain step-by-step how the food is prepared. Serve samples for tasting. **Ask:** What are some ways that your children can help prepare this recipe? How can you use it at home? What do you like about the recipe? What would you change?

**Closing (Away):** (10 min) Pair-up and set specific goals

What did you learn? Why is this information important to you? Choose a goal to work on this month (or week). Try to choose small changes that you can make within a week. For example, a goal might be: "The next time I go shopping, I will compare the label on my family's favorite snack food to another brand". Write your goal on the recipe handout. Ask a friend or family member to help support you in reaching your goal. Invite families to share their goals.

**References and Resources:**

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Draft Version of Lesson 1.4: Do Not Reproduce without Permission of Authors May 27, 2017

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