

Be a Nutrition Label Ninja

Estimated reading time: 6 minutes

You probably work all day and don't have the time to scratch cook a diabetic friendly meal. Especially one that contains a list of 12 ingredients and takes an hour or more to prepare. Cooking at home can be a challenge. And you might not enjoy cooking. We get that. Sometimes it's nice to put a prepared meal in the microwave and save the time and effort of preparing a meal from scratch.

Whether you buy individual ingredients for meals or meals that are quick and easy to prepare and available as pantry items, refrigerator or frozen, making the right choices makes all the difference.

It's all right there for you on the label of nutrition facts. Understanding what's listed on a food product helps you to make the right choices. With the exception of fresh items such as produce, seafood and meats, nutrition labels are provided on each food product. The nutrition label breaks down the nutritional values of the ingredients listed on the label. The label shows number of servings per package and that is based on what the label says constitutes a single serving size. Serving sizes vary from product to product. If the serving size on the label is 1/2 cup and you eat 1 cup you must double the nutritional values.

So, what should you look for? Let's start off with the starch and sugar. They are members of the carb family. In moderation they are your friends. They are common ingredients in most prepared items. Carbs are the major group that impacts blood glucose. Blood glucose is the amount of sugar in the blood.

The total carbohydrate label means all carbs. This means **fiber, starch and sugar**. It's a foolish choice to use up your daily carb allowance in one meal. Spread the carbs you eat over the day so your body can keep up with a big spike in your blood glucose level. You want to keep a steady state of carb intake. Not too much and not too little during a meal. (You may want two slices of bread at dinner but one might be the better choice.)

Let's break down fibers are created absorption of blood glucose

Nutrition Facts			
Serving size 2/3 cup (164g)			
Servings per container about 4			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories	300	Calories from Fat	180
		% Daily Value*	
Total Fat	20g		31%
Saturated Fat	12g		60%
Trans Fat	0.5g		
Cholesterol	60mg		20%
Sodium	450mg		19%
Total Carbohydrate	21g		7%
Dietary Fiber	2g		8%
Sugars	1g		
Protein	8g		
Vitamin A	15%	Vitamin C	30%
Calcium	10%	Iron	4%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

		Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g	
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g	
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg	
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2400mg	
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g	
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g	

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Natural sugars such as those derived from fruit products are a safer bet than added sugars such as cane sugar.

TIP: Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, Freedman School of Nutrition Science at Tufts University, recommends a carb to fiber ratio of 10:1 or lower. 1 gram of fiber for every 10 grams of carbs.

It goes without saying that sodium must be managed. The American Diabetes Association recommends no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day. Sodium is present in almost every prepared and processed food. Look at the nutrition label for this prepared meal. It contains 450 milligrams of sodium in 2/3 cup. While prepared foods labeled "less sodium" or "no sodium" may be a turn off, remember that you can always add salt free spices and seasonings at home. This way you remain in control of your sodium intake.

Fat content will be listed on the nutrition label. There is no label breakdown of so called "good" fat and "bad" fat. But type of fat will be listed. Be on the lookout for saturated fats and trans fats. The nutrition label above tells us that this particular prepared meal contains saturated and trans fats. It also tells us that for a 2/3 cup serving 180 of the 300 calories are saturated and trans-fat calories. That's 60%! In my book that's too much. They are the bad guys. They can put you at risk for heart disease. Look for the healthy fats such as olive oil and canola oil. Remember that fat contains a high number of calories. Too much can result in weight gain and create a resistance to insulin.

Carve out a few minutes of your shopping trip to study labels and make smart choices about the nutrition you feed your body. Remember there is no one size fits all to tackling diabetes. Curate your targeted ingredients with your health care provider.