

Substance Over Style

Learning the truth about your favorite foods can often feel like a rude awakening.

Darrell W. Butler

Parisi Sports Performance Coach; ACE, NFPT CPT



Discovering that “fat free donuts” don’t really exist may be just as traumatic as it was to learn the truth about the tooth fairy and the Easter Bunny. Unfortunately this is a necessary step that you’ll need to take in order to learn how the foods that you’re consuming truly affect your body. With that said, here are several things to consider when analyzing your food label so that you can avoid being duped the next time that you visit the grocery store.

Serving Size - This is usually the first thing listed on the top of the label and it contains two key pieces of information. The first piece of information is the portion that equals the serving size represented on the label and the second is how many of these servings are actually contained within the package. It’s crucial that you pay very close attention to these to figures because if you exceed the serving size indicated, you’ll need to do some math in order to figure out exactly how much of each ingredient you’ve ingested.

Fats – The total amount of fat will typically be listed near the top of the label as well and this is another key statistic. Generally speaking, you should aim not to have more than 30 percent of your total calories (or more than 3 grams for every 100 calories) come from fat. You’ll also want to aim for foods that contain zero trans-fats and are lower in saturated fats. Of course, fats aren’t all created equally so your body does actually require some essential fats (Omega 3 for example) to function properly so “low fat” is great but “no fat” isn’t always necessary..

Total Carbohydrates and Sugar – Carbohydrates are also not all created equally. Complex carbohydrates (the starchy kind) tend to break down slower and have less of an immediate impact on your blood sugar and energy levels than simple carbohydrates which are mostly comprised of sugar. While some people fear carbohydrates like the plague, your body actually requires them for energy, however as you’ve probably guessed from the previous statement, you’ll want to consume mostly complex carbohydrates. For this reason, most nutritional labels have a secondary category under carbohydrates where they list the amount of sugars as well. In general, you’ll want to aim for less than 20 grams of sugar per serving. And for weight loss, aim to have no more than 40 percent of your total calories for the day come from carbohydrates, regardless of the type.

Sodium – If your diet relies heavily upon prepackaged meals, you’ll definitely want to pay very close attention to this category as most are absolutely loaded with sodium and preservatives.

While limited amounts of sodium are also required for the body to function properly, you’ll generally want to aim for less than 2,400 milligrams per day.

Most frozen foods (yes even those “healthy” ones in the pretty packages that support various weight loss programs), soups and deli meats often contain extreme amounts of sodium. Even if the label indicates that it’s the “low sodium” version of the product, that doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s healthy, that simply means that it’s healthier than the original version so you’ll still need to do your homework and analyze the label before making your selection.

Excess amounts of sodium can wreak havoc on your heart and your general well-being so choose wisely and if you do occasionally splurge be sure to drink plenty of water to help offset some of the negative effects.

Fiber - As I’m sure you’ve already heard; fiber is great for you. Among its many benefits is its ability to help lower cholesterol and suppress hunger. And of course it’s also great for aiding with digestion and keeping you “regular” so generally speaking the higher the fiber, the better (so long as you have access to a bathroom if you’re consuming extreme amounts!).

Protein - While there are many differing opinions on exactly how much protein you should have, 2 things are certain. One is that if you’re the average American, you’re most likely not consuming enough and the second certainty is that you will not develop any muscle tone without incorporating protein into your diet.

Obviously men and women have different nutritional requirements as do those with certain medical conditions, however generally speaking you’ll want to incorporate a quality protein into every meal. Not only do proteins help to develop lean muscle mass, they also break down slower for sustained energy throughout the day. For that reason, look for items that contain higher amounts as long as the fat and sodium content is still within a healthy range.

Total Number of Ingredients – At the bottom of most food labels you’ll see a list of the ingredients that your item contains. Generally speaking, the shorter the list, the healthier the item. For example, it’s highly unlikely that you’re going to see a long list of ingredients on a stalk of broccoli or a bag of baby carrots! Also make sure that sugar is not the first ingredient listed since the main ingredients are always listed first.



Darrell W. Butler has trained, managed and consulted for fitness centers and media outlets around the world. When he’s not training a client or sharing his words of wisdom, you can catch him drinking a PFC Berries A’More Recovery Shake at his local gym’s juice bar! For more information visit the Darrell Butler Personal Training website at www.dbptonline.com

PFC

PERFORMANCE FOOD CENTERS WHOLE FOODS ENGINEERED BY NATURE