



# HEALTH BEAT 2004

Cattaraugus County Health Department Newsletter  
"Public Health for Healthy Communities"

Fall Edition, 2004

Vol. 4 No. 4



## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS OF THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT

**Q.** I am hearing a great deal about trans fats in foods and would like to learn more. Can you help?

**A.** This newsletter deals with a great deal of information regarding trans fats and understanding the food label. Please read this entire newsletter so that you can make sure you are making the right choices.

**Q.** What is Trans Fat?

**A.** The majority of trans fat is formed when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats like shortening and hard margarine. However, a small amount of trans fat is found naturally, primarily in some animal-based foods. Essentially, trans fat is made when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil, a process called hydrogenation. Hydrogenation increases shelf life and flavor stability of foods containing these fats.



**Q.** What are the dangers of trans fat?

**A.** Trans fat, like saturated fat and dietary cholesterol, raises the LDL ( bad) cholesterol that increases your risk for coronary heart disease. On average, Americans consume 4 to 5 times as much saturated fat as trans fat in their diet.

**Q.** Where will I find trans fat?

**A.** Vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, snack foods, and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils.

**Q.** What can I do to limit fats in my diet?

**A.** Learn to read the food label. Choose the food with the lower amount of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Consumers can find trans fat listed on the Nutrition Facts panel directly under the line for saturated fat. Many food products have already listed trans fat on the label but food manufacturers have until January 2006 to list it on all products.

**Q.** Are all fats unnecessary?

**A.** No. Fat is a major source of energy for the body and aids in the absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K and carotenoids. Both animal and plant-derived food products contain fat, and when eaten in moderation, fat is important for proper growth, development, and maintenance of good health. Fats are an especially important source of calories and nutrients for infants and toddlers (up to 2 years of age), who have the highest energy needs per unit of body weight of any age group.

**Q.** What fats should I choose?

**A.** Replace trans fat and saturated fat with mono- and polyunsaturated fats. These fats do not raise LDL (or Bad) cholesterol levels and have health benefits when eaten in moderation. Sources of monounsaturated fats include olive and canola oils. Sources of polyunsaturated fats include soybean oil, corn oil, sunflower oil and foods like nuts and fish. Choose vegetable oils (except coconut and palm kernel oils) and soft margarines (liquid, tub or spray) more often because the amounts of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol are lower than the amount in solid shortening and hard margarines.

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## HOW TO READ A FOOD LABEL

Print page 2 and page 3 to learn how to read the food label.

Page 3 explains the food label step by step.

### Sample label for Macaroni & Cheese



1. Start Here

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Serving Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	

2.

Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
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3. Limit these  
Nutrients

% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 12 g	18%
Saturated Fat 3 g	15%
Trans Fat 1.5 g	
Cholesterol 30 mg	10%
Sodium 470 mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31 g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0 g	0%
Sugars 5 g	
Protein 5 g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

5. Quick Guide to % DV

5% or less is Low

20% or more is High

4. Get enough  
of these  
Nutrients

6. Footnote

*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:	<b>2,000</b>	<b>2,500</b>
Total Fat	Less than	65 g	80 g
Sat Fat	Less than	20 g	25 g
Cholesterol	Less than	300 mg	300 mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400 mg	2,400 mg
Total Carbohydrate		300 g	375 g
Dietary Fiber		25 g	30 g

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**The next issue of this newsletter will deal with portion size,  
the Food Pyramid and how to understand it.**

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### **The Serving Size (#1 on sample label)**

The first place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts panel is the serving size and number of servings in the package. Pay close attention to the serving size, including how many servings there are in the food package, and compare it to how much you actually eat. If you eat more than one serving, you must calculate properly.

The sample label shows a serving as 1 cup and servings per container as 2.

### **Calories and Calories from fat (#2 on sample label)**

The next step is seeing how many calories are in the serving and how many calories come from fat. Eating too many calories per day is linked to overweight and obesity.

The sample label shows calories as 250 and calories from fat as 110.



### **The Nutrients (# 3 and 4 on sample label)**

Under the calories section, find the nutrients. The nutrients listed first are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much. Eating too much fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol or sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. It is important to limit these nutrients.

Next you will find dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. These are nutrients that are lacking in American diets. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions.

### **The Percent Daily Value (#5 on sample label)**

The Percent Daily Value (% DV) tells you whether the nutrients (fat, sodium, fiber, etc.) in a serving of foods contribute a lot or a little to your total daily diet. % DVs are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet. For a healthy diet, try to limit your total daily intake of fat, saturated fat, sodium and cholesterol to less than 100DV.

You should try to get enough essential nutrients like calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C as well as other components such as dietary fiber. Try to average 100% for each of these nutrients each day.

% DVs are easy to use. You do not need to calculate percentages to understand. The label helps you interpret the numbers on the same scale (0-100 DV), much like a ruler. This way you can tell high from low and know which nutrients contribute a lot, or a little, to your daily-recommended allowance. The general guide tells you that 5% DV or less is low and 20% DV or more is high.

There are no % DV in sugars, protein and trans fats because there has been no reference value for trans fat or sugars and protein. To limit nutrients that have no % DV, like trans fat and sugars, compare the labels of similar products and choose the food with the lowest amount.

### **The Food Label**

Once you understand the food label, it will be much easier to make healthy choices in your diet.

## TERMS FOUND ON A FOOD PACKAGE

**Calorie Free** - No more than 5 calories per serving

**Sugar Free** - Less than one-half gram of sugar per serving

**Salt Free** - Fewer than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving

**Fat Free** - Less than one-half gram of fat per serving

**Low fat** - No more than 3 grams of fat per serving

**Low sodium** - No more than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving

**Light** - 1/3 or fewer calories, or 1/2 the fat in the regular version



## TIPS TO HELP YOU CHOOSE SENSIBLE PORTIONS

### **When eating out:**

Choose a small or medium portion. This includes main dishes, side dishes, and beverages, as well. Remember that water is always a good option for quenching your thirst.

If main dish portions are larger than you want, order an appetizer or side dish instead, or share a meal with a friend.

Resign from the **clean your plate club** when you've eaten enough. Leave the rest. If you can chill the extra food right away, take it home in a doggie bag.

Ask for a salad dressing to be served on the side so you can add only as much as you want.

Order an item from the menu instead of the all-you-can eat buffet.

### **At home:**

Once or twice, measure your typical portion of foods you eat often. Use standard measuring cups. This will help you estimate the portion size of these foods and similar foods.

Be especially careful to limit portions of foods high in calories, such as cakes, cookies, other sweets, and fats, oils and spreads.

Try using a smaller plate for your meal.