labels 101

The only way we can control what we put in our bodies is to know what we consume. Nutrition labels are on all food products, as a way of telling us what's in the food we eat. Knowing what to look for on a label, as well as red flags, is key to putting your weight loss knowledge to use and reaping the benefits. Let's look at this label for a 2.45 oz bag of cheesy puff snacks.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 oz.
Servings Per Container About 2 (2.45 oz)

Amount Per Serving

Calories 160	Calories from Fat 90
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 10g	**15%**
Saturated Fat 2g	**10%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol less than 5mg	**1%**
Sodium 350mg	**15%**
Total Carbohydrate 13g	**4%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars less than 1g	
Protein 2g	

Vitamin A 0%	•	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	•	Iron 2%
Vitamin E 6%	•	Thiamin 4%
Riboflavin 4%	•	Niacin 2%
Vitamin B_6 2%	•	Phosphorus 2%

* 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	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Ingredients: Enriched Corn Meal (Corn Meal, Ferrous Sulfate, Niacin, Thiamin Mononitrate, Riboflavin, and Folic Acid), Corn and/or Sunflower Oil, Why, Cheddar Cheese (Cultured Milk, Salt, Enzymes), Salt, and Less than 2% of the Following: Partially Hydrogenated Soybean Oil, Maltodextrin, Disodium Phosphate, Sour Cream (Cultured Cream, Nonfat Milk), Artificial Flavor, Monosodium Glutamate, Lactic Acid, Artificial Colors (Including Yellow 6), and Citric Acid.
CONTAINS MILK INGREDIENTS

Trans fats

- **Serving Size:** This is the amount of food the values on the label are based on. In our example, the serving size is 1 ounce.
- **Servings Per Container:** Food is often packaged with multiple servings even if they look like one serving. So it's important to check the package size for exact number of servings. Our cheesy puffs give values for a one ounce serving, but if you eat the whole bag, you're eating 2.45 servings, so you need to multiply each value by 2.45. Also, watch out for the word "about."
- **Ingredients:** Ingredients are listed in high-to-low order for the amount used. So the first few ingredients should optimally be nutrient-rich. High sugar foods will have words like sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltose, and corn syrup toward the beginning of the list. Good carb sources will list whole grains towards the beginning of the list.
- **Calories:** Always check the calorie content and remember, sometimes you may need to multiply the calories by the number of servings for the total calories. One serving of cheesy puffs has 160 calories, but the whole bag is 392 calories!
- **Total Fat:** We need some fat in our diets, but remember to keep it in balance and consider the nutrient values to avoid getting fat with "empty calories."
- **Saturated Fat:** These are "bad fats" and you want to eat these sparingly.
- **Trans Fat:** Remember, there's nothing good about trans fats. The tricky part is, if a food contains less than .5 grams per serving, it's labeled as 0g. So to be sure, check the ingredients list for "partially hydrogenated" oils. Our cheesy puffs appear to be trans fat-free, but looking at the ingredients we can see "partially hydrogenated," so there could be up to a gram or more in the whole bag.
- **Total Carbohydrate:** This can tell you how many carbohydrates are in the food, and if they are good or bad carbs. Dietary fiber is a good source of carbs, while sugars usually are not. The cheesy puff snacks are full of refined, or "bad" carbs - we can tell because they have no dietary fiber, no whole grains (check ingredients), and low nutrients. Remember that protein should always be eaten with carbs, so it's a good idea to check the protein next.
- **Protein:** Many of us don't get enough protein, and doing so helps weight loss, so this is an important item to keep track of. The cheesy puffs are not protein rich. If a food has high carbohydrates and low protein, you may want to eat a high-protein food with it, or choose a different food altogether.
- **Micronutrients:** The list of vitamins and minerals helps you to see how nutrient-dense the food is. If you're eating a food with a lot of calories, but not many vitamins and minerals, it may not be a great choice. Less than 5% of daily value of a vitamin or mineral is *low* in that nutrient; 10-20% is considered a good source; and more than 20% is high in that nutrient. In our case, there's almost no nutrition. This is basically a bag of "empty calories."

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