



## READING FOOD LABELS

In 1990, the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act went into effect to help consumers better understand what they were eating in terms of ingredients, macronutrient breakdown, and total caloric consumption. The effort was led by the USDA and the FDA. The information on food labels is extremely valuable for the individual consumer. But the challenge remained, being able to understand the food label as pure data and avoid marketing techniques of the overall labels of the food.

According to the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act, all food labels must contain the following information:

- **General name of the product**
- **Product's manufacturer including address**
- **Net contents in terms of weight, measure or count, and:**

**Ingredient List** – Lists the ingredients in descending order of predominance and weight.

**Serving Size** - Manufacturer must identify a single serving of the food item. It is important to remember that the manufacturer determines the size; this is not to be confused with the USDA serving size recommendations.

**Nutrition Facts** – Each package must identify on the label specific quantities of nutrients specified by the USDA and RDA. Calories, calories from fat, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, fiber, sugar, and protein.

Below you will find a food label example of the 80% fat-free ground beef hamburger. It is important to remember the caloric breakdown of macronutrients:

- **1 gram of protein = 4 calories**
- **1 gram of carbohydrates = 4 calories**
- **1 gram of fat = 9 calories**
- **1 gram of alcohol = 7 calories**

# Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 3 oz

## Amount per Serving

**Calories**  
240

Calories from Fat 153

### % Daily Value \*

<b>Total Fat 17g</b>	<b>26%</b>
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Cholesterol 75mg</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Sodium 65mg</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate 0g</b>	<b>0%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Protein 21g</b>	<b>42%</b>
Iron	<b>10%</b>

Looking at the food label more in-depth you will notice that the food label on the 80% ground beef label identifies that it is 80% fat-free by weight. This means literally placing the burger on a scale and being able to take out 20% of the burgers weight and signifying this as fat. What does this mean to the consumer? Nothing – in the end what is important to the consumer is the macronutrient breakdown for energy purposes.

The total fat is 17g in the 3oz. serving size. By multiplying 17 x 9 calories, we quickly identify that 153 calories of the burger is fat out of the total 240 calories. This equates to **64%** of the beef is fat! Not exactly a marketer's dream equation. The marketer and manufacturer are telling the truth, by identifying through weight and preying on the uneducated consumer. Hopefully this article opens your eyes to the true importance of

reading food labels; remember the calorie per gram of nutrient is the most important part of the food label.