

# Understanding Health Claims on Food Products

## Be a savvy consumer

Food manufacturers use health claims on their products and/or in advertising to promote sales by conveying the health benefits of the product. Research suggests that nearly seven out of 10 Americans feel it is easier to decide what to buy when food products have printed health claims. However, understanding what the many health claims mean can be a challenge.

Some health claims are approved by the Food and Drug Administration; others may be endorsements by commodity associations, independent organizations, or specific companies. Using the Nutrition Facts panel will help you make informed decisions when choosing food products.

### For more information

check these publications at <https://store.extension.iastate.edu>

*Get Ready for the New Nutrition Facts Label*, PM 1979

*Dietary Guidelines recommend. . . series PM 1979a-f*

*What is a Nutrition Profile? . . . PM2095*

## Identify FDA-approved health claims

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows specific health claims for particular foods. These claims do not suggest that specific foods offer a cure for a specific disease but instead offer guidance to reduce risk of contracting a disease or making a current health situation worse. Page 2 provides a list of 16 health claims approved by the FDA and Health Claims Authorized Based on an Authoritative Statement by Federal Scientific Bodies. An FDA approved health claim means:

- The claim is supported by scientific research.
- The nutrient(s) in the product is (are) related to the disease stated.
- Other nutrients in the product are used in healthful quantities.

### Example



### Health Claim

*Three grams of soluble fiber daily from whole grain oat foods, like Cheerios, in a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease. Cheerios provides 1 gram per serving.*

**In addition to the specific FDA claim made, the following nutrient criteria also must be met.**

Quantities of **all\*** of the following nutrients must be less than the listed level.

	Single Food Item	Main Dishes	Meal Products
Fat	13 gm	19.5 gm	26 gm
Saturated Fat	4 gm	6 gm	8 gm
Cholesterol	60 mg	90 mg	120 mg
Sodium	480 mg	720 mg	960 mg

**\*All are less than maximum allowed amounts (for a single food item).**

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (28g)			
Children Under 4 - 3/4 cup (21g)			
Servings Per Container about 18			
Children Under 4 - about 24			
Amount Per Serving	Cheerios	with 1/2 cup of skim milk	Cereal for Children Under 4
<b>Calories</b>	100	140	80
Calories from Fat	15	20	10
% Daily Value			
<b>Total Fat</b> 2g	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	1.5g
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0%</b>	<b>3%</b>	0g
Trans Fat 0g			0g
Polyunsaturated Fat 0.5g			0g
Cholesterol 0mg	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	10mg
Sodium 190mg	<b>8%</b>	<b>10%</b>	140mg
Potassium 170mg	<b>5%</b>	<b>11%</b>	130mg
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 20g	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>	15g
Dietary Fiber 3g	<b>11%</b>	<b>11%</b>	2g
% Daily Value			
Protein	—	—	2g
Vitamin A	10%	15%	10%
Vitamin C	10%	10%	10%
Calcium	10%	25%	8%
Iron	45%	45%	50%

### At least one of six nutrients\*\*

(vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium, protein, fiber) must meet at least 10 percent of the Daily Value (%DV) without fortification.

**\*\*Five of the required nutrients have at least 10 percent of the Daily Value (%DV).**

## FDA-approved health claims and model claim statements

Calcium, vitamin D, and osteoporosis	Adequate calcium and vitamin D throughout life, as part of a well-balanced diet, may reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Adequate calcium and vitamin D as a part of a healthful diet, along with physical activity, may reduce the risk of osteoporosis in later life.
Dietary fat and cancer	Development of cancer depends on many factors. A diet low in total fat may reduce the risk of some cancers.
Dietary saturated fat and cholesterol and risk of coronary heart disease	While many factors affect heart disease, diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of this disease.
Dietary sugar alcohol and dental caries	Frequent between-meal consumption of foods high in sugars and starches promotes tooth decay. The sugar alcohols in [name of food] do not promote tooth decay.
Fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables and cancer	Low fat diets rich in fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer, a disease associated with many factors.
Fluoridated water and reduced risk of dental caries	Drinking fluoridated water may reduce the risk of [dental carries or tooth decay].
Folate and neural tube defects	Healthful diets with adequate folate may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with a brain or spinal cord defect.
Fruits and vegetables and cancer	Low fat diets rich in fruits and vegetables (foods that are low in fat and may contain dietary fiber, vitamin A, or vitamin C) may reduce the risk of some types of cancer, a disease associated with many factors. Broccoli is high in vitamin A and C, and it is a good source of dietary fiber.
Fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain fiber, particularly soluble fiber, and risk of coronary heart disease	Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol and rich in fruits, vegetables, and grain products that contain some types of dietary fiber, particularly soluble fiber, may reduce the risk of heart disease, a disease associated with many factors.
Plant sterol/stanol esters and risk of coronary heart disease	Foods containing at least 0.65 gram per serving of plant sterol esters, eaten twice a day with meals for a daily total intake of at least 1.3 grams, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease. A serving of [name of food] supplies __ grams of vegetable oil sterol esters.
Potassium and the risk of high blood pressure and stroke	Diets containing foods that are a good source of potassium and that are low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.
Saturated fat, cholesterol, <i>trans</i> fat, and reduced risk of heart disease	Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and as low as possible in <i>trans</i> fat, may reduce the risk of heart disease.
Sodium and hypertension	Diets low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure, a disease associated with many factors.
Soluble fiber from certain foods and risk of coronary heart disease	Soluble fiber from foods such as [name of soluble fiber source, and, if desired, name of food product], as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease. A serving of [name of food product] supplies __ grams of the [necessary daily dietary intake for the benefit] soluble fiber from [name of soluble fiber source] necessary per day to have this effect.
Soy protein and risk of coronary heart disease	25 grams of soy protein a day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease. A serving of [name of food] supplies __ grams of soy protein.
Whole grain foods and risk of heart disease and certain cancers	Diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods and low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers.

Source: <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/GuidanceDocuments/FoodLabelingNutrition/FoodLabelingGuide/ucm064919.htm>

## Recognize other claims

Not all products that could use the FDA health claims do so. Earning FDA approval requires more time than some manufacturers are willing to commit. Store brand products often do not include any package statements, regardless of nutrient content. Some products seek consumer attention by making their own, similar claims. For example, some organizations and corporations use symbols on various products to promote certain ingredients or to point out how they fit into a healthy diet.

### American Heart Association Heart-check Certification Program

<http://heartcheckmark.org>

This program started in 1995 to help consumers identify heart healthy foods and is widely used today. Designated products meet specific nutrition guidelines that are in accordance with the approved health claims from the Food and Drug Administration. Manufacturers can join the heart check program by contacting the American Heart Association. Consumers can learn more about the program by visiting the website listed above.

Products may carry either a standard heart check or a whole grain heart check. Both have similar nutrient requirements. The difference is that the whole grain heart check has to have a minimum level of whole grain and fiber, as shown in the table.

### American Heart Association Heart Check Criteria

Source: <http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@fc/documents/downloadable/ucm439218.pdf>

	Standard Certification	Whole Grain Certification
Total Fat	Less than 6.5 gms	Less than 6.5 gms
Saturated Fat	1gm or less	1 gm or less
Cholesterol	20 mg or less	20 mg or less
Sodium	480 mg or less*	480 mg or less*
Contains 10% or more of the daily value of 1 of 6 nutrients; vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium, protein, or dietary fiber	Yes	Yes
Trans fat**	0.5 gm or less	0.5 gm or less
Whole grain		51 % by weight/RACC***
Minimum Dietary Fiber		1.7 g/RACC*** of 30 gms 2.5 g/RACC*** of 45 gms 2.8 g/RACC*** of 50 gms

\*2014 sodium criteria will vary based on food category.

\*\*The *trans* fat criterion was effective Jan. 1, 2006 for new products.

\*\*\*Reference Amount Customarily Consumed

Although many foods use the identifying mark on their packages, some heart healthy foods may not because manufacturers may choose not to participate even though their

food product may meet the nutrient requirements. Compare product labels to decide which is the best product for you.

### Whole Grains Council

[www.wholegrainscouncil.org](http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org)



The Whole Grain Stamp (introduced in January 2005) is now used on more than 7,500 products from more than 335 members. Food manufacturers can use the Stamp if they join the Whole Grains Council and pay an annual fee (\$1000–\$9000) based on their company size.

*Whole Grain Stamps are a trademark of Oldways Preservation Trust and the Whole Grains Council.*

Products that don't carry the Whole Grain Stamp could be an equally good—or even better—choice, but it's up to you as the consumer to compare the nutrition facts panel and ingredient list.

Two types of stamps can be used.

- Products with the **100% Stamp** have all grain ingredients as whole grains and the product contains at least 16 grams (a full serving) of whole grains per labeled serving.
- Products with the **Basic Stamp** have at least 8 grams (a half serving) of whole grain but may also contain some refined grains.

- Each stamp also includes the number of grams of whole grain ingredients per labeled serving.

### Why so much emphasis on whole grains?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 recommend 1) that half of all grain servings be whole grain and 2) eating 14 grams of fiber per every 1,000 calories. For more information, see *Dietary Guidelines Recommend... Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains* (PM 1979c)

## Dairy Management Inc.

www.3aday.org

The 3-A-Day campaign promotes dairy products and is not affiliated with any single manufacturer. The logo appears on some milk, cheese, and yogurt products. Always check the Nutrition Facts Panel when shopping to ensure you are getting the nutrients you need.



## Why so much emphasis on dairy products?

Dairy products contain three of the four nutrients of concern, identified by the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (calcium, potassium, and vitamin D). The campaign encourages and reminds us that we need three servings of dairy a day. One serving is measured as 8 ounces of milk or yogurt or 1.5 ounces of cheese. Dairy products contain many important nutrients but also can be high in fat. Choosing low fat and nonfat dairy products is a healthy way to increase your intake of calcium, potassium, and vitamin D.

## Why so much emphasis on fruits and vegetables?

Eating fruits and vegetables is associated with several beneficial effects, including weight management, reduced risk of some cancers, reduction in blood pressure, reduced risk of stroke and heart disease, and reduced risk of diabetes. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 recommend 2 cups of fruit and 2.5 cups of vegetables daily. When purchasing canned, frozen, or dried fruits and vegetables, look on the Nutrition Facts Panel and ingredient list for sodium or sugars that may have been added.

## Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH)

www.pbhfoundation.org/

Introduced in March 2007, this symbol and brand replaces the earlier 5 A Day campaign used in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This symbol identifies products containing at least one serving of fruit or vegetable and other nutrients in the product in healthful quantities. Not all products that meet these requirements will use this symbol because it requires the food manufacturer to become licensed.



Products displaying this symbol also must meet these requirements:

- Be fresh, or if canned, have only water added.
- Processed products (100% juice, fresh-cut, frozen, canned, and dried) must contain at least one serving of fruit or vegetable. They also must:
  - limit added sweeteners (8 calories or less per serving),
  - limit fat (3 grams or less per serving),
  - contain 480 milligrams or less of sodium per serving,
  - and provide at least 0.014 grams per calorie of naturally occurring fiber.



## PepsiCo Inc.

smartspot.com

Food companies also may develop product symbols. Read labels and/or check websites to learn what the symbols mean. For example, PepsiCo uses a "Smart Spot" symbol on products that meet specific nutrient requirements. Foods and beverages that carry PepsiCo's Smart Spot symbol meet nutrition criteria based on authoritative statements from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the National Academy of Sciences.

These criteria are:

- Contain at least 10 percent of the Daily Value of a targeted nutrient and meet limits for fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugar;
- OR, are formulated to have specific health or wellness benefits;
- OR, are reduced in calories or nutrients, such as fat, saturated fat, sodium, or sugar.

Additional information, including specific details about the criteria are available at [www.smartspot.com](http://www.smartspot.com).

*3-A-Day is a trademark of Dairy Management Inc.; "Fruits & veggies: more matters" logo is used with permission from the Iowa Department of Public Health; "SMART CHOICES MADE EASY" is used with permission from PepsiCo Inc.*

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