

# Food Labels

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What information do you usually find on the front of a food package?
2. What information do you find on the back or side of a food package?
3. What do people look for when reading food labels?
4. What types of foods do not usually have food labels?



### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. information overload | a) able to be used in place of another, very similar            |
| ___ 2. manufacturer         | b) a feeling that there is too much to read or learn            |
| ___ 3. nutritious           | c) recommended consumption for one person at one period of time |
| ___ 4. misleading           | d) not having to follow the usual rules or restrictions         |
| ___ 5. consumer             | e) causing to believe something that is not true                |
| ___ 6. sodium               | f) a person who buys, uses, or eats something                   |
| ___ 7. interchangeable      | g) changed from its natural state to help foods last longer     |
| ___ 8. serving              | h) providing health benefits                                    |
| ___ 9. exempt               | i) the organization that makes the product                      |
| ___ 10. processed           | j) a compound found in salt, added to foods for flavor          |

## Reading

### FOOD LABELS

#### *Information overload*

1. *No sugar added. Fat-free. No artificial colors. Low in carbs.* These are just a few of the phrases **manufacturers** use on the front of food packaging to convince consumers that a product is **nutritious**. According to health experts, food packaging labels are often **misleading**. They focus on what a product doesn't have (fat-free) rather than what it does have (22 grams of sugar).
2. To find the truth, **consumers** need to turn the package over and examine the ingredients list. In many countries, the information on the back or side of a food package is regulated by the government. In addition to an ingredients list, labels must identify common food allergens, such as nuts, wheat, milk, seafood, and eggs. Consumers can also find out a product's nutritional value. Nutritionists recommend foods that are low in sugar and **sodium** and high in fiber and vitamins.
3. Determining whether or not a product is nutritious is not always as easy as it sounds. One thing to watch for is **serving** size. A single bottle of juice may contain 2–3 servings. Another thing to watch for is food words that may or may not be **interchangeable**. When it comes to food labels, *multigrain* is not *wholegrain* just like *natural* is not *certified organic*. On the other hand, *fructose*, *sucrose*, and *barley malt* all mean sweetener.
4. Do you suffer from **information overload** at the grocery store? Manufacturers count on this! They carefully craft their product names and graphics to convince consumers to buy a product without looking beyond the front label. A granola bar may have the word "nature" in it and feature a jogger on the front, but it may also contain more sugar than an average chocolate bar.
5. The healthiest foods are typically single-ingredient, fresh foods that are **exempt** from food labeling laws. This includes fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs, as well as non-**processed** meats and fish. Foods and beverages without a food label are not necessarily healthy, however. In many countries, alcohol does not require a food label. Foods that are prepared for immediate consumption (e.g., baked goods and sandwiches) are usually exempt from food labels as well.

*"By law, food labels must be true. But manufacturers can pick and choose which facts to highlight and spin."*

—Tanya Joliffe, health educator

#### What's the difference?

##### MULTIGRAIN VS. WHOLEGRAIN

*Wholegrain* means that all parts of the grain are used. Nutritionists recommend wholegrain foods, such as whole wheat or whole oats. These are high in fiber.

*Multigrain* means that many types of grain are used, and those foods may not contain any whole grains. Nutritionists suggest avoiding foods that list enriched wheat flour.

## Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers in your notebook.

1. Why is it important for consumers to look at the back or side of a package?
2. What common allergens do food labels usually identify?
3. Why is it important to look at the serving size on a food package?
4. Why does the reading mention a chocolate bar?
5. Which food products are often exempt from food label laws?

### Words that mean "sweetener"

Did you know that one teaspoon of sugar equals four grams of sugar? Here are some other sweeteners to watch for on packaging. Manufacturers may try to disguise sweeteners by adding healthy-sounding words to them, such as "fruit," "rice," "refined," "organic," and "raw."

- syrup
- words ending in *-ose* (sucrose, fructose, glucose)
- juice (fruit juice, cane juice)
- molasses
- sweetener
- dextrin
- barley malt

## Vocabulary Review

Which word from page 1 is described in the sentence?

#	Sentence	Word
1	It is the people who buy our products that we need to think about.	
2	These crackers are healthy because they are baked, not fried.	
3	The picture of the athlete on the packaging made me think that these crackers were healthy, but they are actually full of fat.	
4	There is so much to read that I don't know what's important or not.	
5	The label tells you how much sugar you are eating in one cup of cereal.	
6	People with high blood pressure should choose foods that are low in salt.	
7	The baker doesn't have to list the ingredients because the bagels are for immediate consumption.	
8	This sandwich meat contains a lot of preservatives.	

# Grammar Review

## RECOMMEND / SUGGEST / ADVISE

### A. Reference

Do you share food recommendations with your friends and family members? You can use the verbs *recommend*, *suggest*, and *advise*.

Purpose	Form	Examples
to suggest a <b>place</b> or <b>thing</b>	follow the verb with a noun <i>recommend/suggest/advise + noun</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My mom recommended this low-fat cereal.</li> <li>• The chef suggests the vegetarian special.</li> <li>• The nutritionist advises a light breakfast. (<i>more formal</i>)</li> </ul>
to recommend an <b>activity</b>	follow the verb with a gerund <i>recommend/suggest/advise + gerund</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My mom recommended buying this low-fat cereal.</li> <li>• The chef suggested ordering the vegetarian special.</li> <li>• The nutritionist advises eating a light breakfast. (<i>more formal</i>)</li> </ul>

These verbs are interchangeable when followed by a noun or gerund. Learn about subtle differences and other possible sentence patterns on our blog.

### B. Practice

Fill in the blanks to complete the sentence. Many options are possible.

1. Did your friend \_\_\_\_\_ the whole-grain or multi-grain bread?
2. My nutritionist advises \_\_\_\_\_ organic produce.
3. I \_\_\_\_\_ lowering your sugar intake.
4. We don't recommend \_\_\_\_\_ new vegetarian restaurant on 1<sup>st</sup> Street.
5. Who advised \_\_\_\_\_ honey instead of sugar?
6. My sister-in-law \_\_\_\_\_ checking the label for allergens.

## Discussion

1. Do you take the time to read food labels at the grocery store?
2. Which unhealthy foods (sugar, salt, fat, caffeine, etc.) are you most concerned about, and why?
3. Do you think food labels should be regulated by the government?
4. Will you make a greater effort to read food labels after doing this lesson? Why or why not?

## Group Assignment

### IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS

Bring in at least one food label to share with your group members. Look at the labels together and try to find the following:

- misleading phrases
- misleading product names
- misleading graphics
- misleading words in the ingredients list (e.g., raw sugar)
- misleading serving sizes

## Listening

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

### FOOD LABELS

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2. To find the truth, \_\_\_\_\_ need to turn the package over and examine the ingredients list. In many countries, the information on the back or side of a food package is regulated by the government. In addition to an ingredients list, labels must identify common food \_\_\_\_\_, such as nuts, wheat, milk, seafood, and eggs. Consumers can also find out a product's nutritional value. Nutritionists recommend foods that are low in sugar and sodium and high in fiber and vitamins.
3. Determining whether or not a product is nutritious is not always as easy as it sounds. One thing to watch for is \_\_\_\_\_ size. A single bottle of juice may contain 2–3 servings. Another thing to watch for is food words that may or may not be \_\_\_\_\_. When it comes to food labels, *multigrain* is not *wholegrain* just like *natural* is not *certified organic*. On the other hand, *fructose*, *sucrose*, and *barley malt* all mean sweetener.
4. Do you suffer from information \_\_\_\_\_ at the grocery store? Manufacturers count on this! They carefully craft their product names and graphics to convince consumers to buy a product without looking beyond the front label. A granola bar may have the word "nature" in it and feature a jogger on the front, but it may also contain more sugar than an average chocolate bar.
5. The healthiest foods are typically single-ingredient, fresh foods that are \_\_\_\_\_ from food labeling laws. This includes fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs, as well as non-\_\_\_\_\_ meats and fish. Foods and beverages without a food label are not necessarily healthy, however. In many countries, alcohol does not require a food label. Foods that are prepared for immediate \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., baked goods and sandwiches) are usually exempt from food labels as well.

# Answer Key

**LESSON DESCRIPTION:**

In this lesson, students read about and discuss food labels. They learn some marketing tricks that manufacturers use and practice using *recommend*, *advise*, and *suggest*.

**LEVEL:** Int – Adv**TIME:** 1.5–2 hours**TAGS:** discussion, food, food labels, marketing, sugar, salt, fat, grocery shopping, label, recommend, advise, suggest

## Pre-Reading

**A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS**

Have students work in small groups or as a class.

**B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW**

- |      |      |      |      |       |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. b | 3. h | 5. f | 7. a | 9. d  |
| 2. i | 4. e | 6. j | 8. c | 10. g |

## Reading (and/or Listening)

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. Discuss the quote. You can also play the listening as your students read along. A gap-fill version of the reading is available on page 6. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

## Comprehension

1. It is important for consumers to look at the back or side of a package to read the ingredients and nutritional value of the contents.
2. Common allergens that food labels usually identify include nuts, wheat, milk, seafood, and eggs.
3. It is important to look at the serving size on a food label because it might be misleading. For example, a bottled beverage may contain more than one serving.
4. The reading mentions a chocolate bar to show that foods that have a healthy product name and appearance, such as granola bars, may be no better for you than junk food.
5. Fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs, as well as non-processed meats and fish, are usually exempt. Alcohol and foods that are prepared for immediate consumption are usually exempt from food labels as well.

*(continued on the next page...)*

## Answer Key cont.

### Vocabulary Review

- |                         |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| 1. consumers            | 5. serving   |
| 2. nutritious           | 6. sodium    |
| 3. misleading           | 7. exempt    |
| 4. information overload | 8. processed |

### Grammar Review

#### B. PRACTICE

Answers will vary.

1. recommend/suggest
2. buying/eating
3. recommend/suggest/advise
4. the
5. using/adding
6. recommends/suggests/advises

Visit our blog to read our editor's comprehensive tips on advise/recommend/suggest:

<https://ellii.com/blog/recommend>

### Discussion

Answers will vary.

Can be done individually or in small groups or pairs.

### Critical Thinking

Answers will vary.

Can be done individually or in small groups or pairs.

### Listening

1. nutritious, misleading
2. consumers, allergens
3. serving, interchangeable
4. overload
5. exempt, processed, consumption

#### SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Labeling*, *Flavor*, *Colors*, and *Fiber*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Labelling*, *Flavour*, *Colours*, and *Fibre*. Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.