Understanding food labels are very important when it comes to understanding what you are eating and consuming on a daily basis. Being able to fully understand a nutrition label will help with weight loss and overall healthier eating when following these simple steps below.

- **Calories** – If you are trying to lose or maintain your weight, the number of calories you eat counts. To lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories than your body burns. You can use the labels to compare similar products and determine which contains fewer calories.

- **Total Fat** – total fat tells you how much fat is in a food per serving. It includes fats that are good for you such as mono and polysaturated fats and fats that are not so good for you such as saturated and trans fats. Mono and polyunsaturated fats can help to lower your blood cholesterol and protect your heart. Saturated and trans fat can raise your blood cholesterol and increase your risk for heart disease.

- **Sodium** – with many foods, you can taste how salty they are, such as pickles or bacon. But there is also hidden salt in many foods, like cheeses, salad dressings, canned soups, and other prepackaged foods. Reading food labels can help you compare the sodium in different foods. You can also try using herbs and spices in your cooking instead of adding salt. Adults should aim for less than 2400 mg per day. If you have high blood pressure, it may be helpful to eat less.

- **Total Carbohydrate** – total carbohydrate on the label includes sugar, complex carbohydrate, and fiber. If you look only at the sugar number, you may end up excluding nutritious foods such as fruits and milks thinking they are too high in sugar. You might also overeat foods such as cereals and grains that have no natural or added sugar, but do contain a lot of carbohydrate.

- **Fiber** – fiber is part of plant foods that is not digested. Dried beans such as kidney beans or pinto beans, fruits, vegetables, and grains are all good sources of fiber. The recommendation is to eat 25-30 grams of fiber per day.

The Nutrition Facts Panel is one of the most important pieces of information found on a food package. It is required on all packaged food and provides information that clarifies the nutrient content what you are eating. From serving size to vitamins and minerals, the Nutrition Facts Panel should be your go-to-guide for choosing healthy foods!

Kids’ Corner

The very top of the list tells you how many servings are in the entire package. Remember, one serving is the basis for the entire Nutrition Facts Panel. Therefore, if the serving size is one cup, but if there are two servings in the package and you eat the entire portion, you’ll want to multiply everything by two in order to know how many total calories, fat, carbohydrates, etc. you’ve consumed.

One other important area on the Nutrition Facts Panel is the far right column, labeled % daily value. This column uses a 2,000 calorie daily meal plan to calculate the percentages of nutrients in the food or beverage. These percentages can provide a means to understand whether certain nutrients such as fat, saturated fat, and sodium are too high or whether or not a food is a good source of a specific vitamin or mineral. When reading the % daily value, remember that 5% or less is considered low and 20% or more is considered high. Using the % daily value allows you to choose foods that best fit your nutrition goals.

Finally, when reading a Nutrition Facts Panel, make sure to look at the ingredients list. Ingredients are listed in order by weight. Using the Nutrition Facts Panel to choose foods low in added sugars and high in vitamins and minerals will help you keep your family’s health and nutrition on the right track to achieving your weight loss and fitness goals!
People with diabetes need the same amount of fiber as everyone else.

- **Sugar alcohols** – these include sorbitol, xylitol, and mannitol. They have fewer calories than sugars and starches. Use of sugar alcohols in a product does not necessarily mean the product is low in carbohydrates or calories. Just because a package says “sugar free” on the outside that does not mean that it is calorie or carbohydrate free. Always remember to check the label for the grams of carbohydrates.

- **List of Ingredients** – ingredients are listed in descending order by weight, meaning the first ingredient makes up the largest proportion of the food. Check the ingredient list to spot things you’d like you avoid. Try to avoid coconut oil or palm oil as they are high in saturated fat and try to also avoid hydrogenated oils that are high in trans fat. The ingredient list is also a good place to look for heart-healthy ingredients such as soy, monounsaturated fats such as olive, canola, or peanut oils; or whole grains like whole wheat flour and oats.

*You should consult with your physician or other health care professional before starting an exercise or diet regimen to determine if it is right for your needs. This is particularly true if you have a history of high blood pressure, heart disease, or if you have experienced chest pain*