

Chapter 17

Shopping for Food

Understanding Label Language

Directions: Read the following selection. Then answer the questions under *Thinking Critically*, and complete the activities as directed by your teacher.

Does a low-fat food have less fat than a reduced-fat food? The information on food labels deals with such questions. Information can be misleading, however, if it's not clearly understood. Using the wealth of facts on food labels takes thoughtful and careful reading.

Label Terminology

In response to consumer concerns, food makers use the following terms on products that are low in fat, calories, and cholesterol:

- ◆ **Lean** A meat, poultry, or fish product that contains less than 10 grams of fat, less than 4 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 100-gram (3.5-oz.) serving.
- ◆ **Extra lean** Meat, poultry, or fish that has less than 5 grams of fat, less than 2 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 100-gram (3.5-oz.) serving.
- ◆ **Percent fat-free** Indicates the grams of fat present in a 100-gram (3.5-oz.) serving of a low-fat or fat-free food. A whipped topping labeled "97 percent fat-free" has 3 grams of fat per 100 grams.
- ◆ **Low-fat** These foods contain 1 g of saturated fat or less per serving.
- ◆ **Low-cholesterol** Indicates a food has less than 20 mg of cholesterol per serving.
- ◆ **Low-calorie** Indicates a food has 40 calories or less per serving.

People who want to limit sodium intake might look for help on labels. *Low sodium* means less than 140 mg of sodium per serving. *Very low sodium* means less than 35 mg of sodium per serving.

Many people are interested in how their food is prepared. The term *fresh* means unprocessed or minimally processed. Exceptions are made for steps needed to ensure safety or preserve freshness. Fruit coated with a protective wax and pasteurized milk can both be called "fresh." Fresh-frozen food was quickly frozen while still fresh.

Organic is a three-tiered definition established by the United States Department of Agriculture to override those definitions used by states and growers'

organizations. A USDA 100 percent organic stamp certifies that a food was produced without pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, or antibiotics (for animal products). Foods that contain 95 percent organic ingredients can carry the USDA organic stamp. Products that are at least 70 percent organic may be labeled simply as *made with organic ingredients*.

Some terms are used to compare a food's nutrient content to that of another product. This product is called the reference food.

- ◆ **More** These foods provide at least 10 percent more of a Daily Value (DV) for a specific nutrient than the reference food. For example, a serving of milk provides 30 percent of the DV for calcium. A product labeled *more calcium than milk* must provide at least 40 percent of the DV for calcium.
- ◆ **Less or fewer** This means a food product provides at least 25 percent fewer nutrients or calories than the reference food. If ice cream has 160 calories per serving, a yogurt labeled *fewer calories than ice cream* must contain 120 calories or less.
- ◆ **Reduced** Indicates a food is altered to contain 25 percent less of a nutrient or 25 percent fewer calories than the product's regular version. Suppose sour cream has 8 grams of fat per serving. How many grams should a reduced-fat sour cream contain?
- ◆ **Light** This is a comparative term used for a food that has been altered from its regular version. A "light" food may contain half the fat of its regular version. It may provide one-third fewer calories than the regular version and receive no more than 50 percent of its calories from fat. Light food may also contain 50 percent or less sodium than its regular version. A food must also be low in fat and calories. Otherwise, the label must specify that the food is light in sodium. The label must also clearly state whether *light* only describes color or texture, as in *light brown sugar*.

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Is It Good for You?

Science continues to strengthen the link between diet and disease prevention. The FDA is slowly allowing carefully worded claims to reflect some of these findings. Most of these statements relate foods that are low in fat and cholesterol or high in fiber to reducing heart disease or certain types of cancer. More recently, foods that are high in soy protein, whole grains, or potassium have been added to that list. Links between calcium and high blood pressure are also frequently mentioned.

Only certain items qualify for these claims. A food must meet the definition named, such as *low-fat* or *a good source of*. It must also fall within specified limits of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Salted, whole-grain crackers made with lard might not qualify as a food that helps to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Claims, too, are very restrictive. They must be clear and complete and state only that eating a certain type of food is one of many factors linked to a lowered risk of developing a particular condition. A claim about folate, a B vitamin known to help prevent some birth defects, might read: *Recommended amounts of folate in a healthy diet may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with a brain or spinal cord defect.*

Warnings, Too!

Other health concerns have an opposite effect, leading food makers to add warnings on labels.

Food safety and foodborne illness are of great concern to food makers and consumers. Since 1994, the USDA has mandated that a *Safe Handling Instructions* label appear on packages of meat and poultry, outlining the food-handling procedures you are learning in this course. Similarly, in 2001, the FDA began requiring egg cartons to bear instructions for safe egg storage and safe cooking. Food allergies are another example. A person who is allergic to peanuts would never eat peanut butter; however, he or she may not notice the *hydrolyzed peanut protein* far down on an ingredient list for an oatmeal cookie. At the FDA's urging, manufacturers point out the most common allergens by placing them on a separate line of bold type. This helps to protect food makers and consumers alike.

Most recently, the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans emphasize the need to handle all foods safely. This means handling, storing, and preparing food properly to prevent illness. Here are some tips to keep food safe:

- ◆ Wash your hands before and after handling food.
- ◆ Keep your work surfaces clean and always use clean utensils.
- ◆ Keep raw foods away from ready-to-eat foods.
- ◆ Cook foods to recommended safe temperatures.
- ◆ Promptly refrigerate foods that spoil quickly.

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Thinking Critically

1. What part of the food label is most helpful to you? Why?

2. What information on a food label will you use to help you decide which product to buy? Explain your answer.

3. How often do you check the dates on food products you buy? Can you eat food after the open date has expired? Why or why not?

4. What types of food are sold at a farmer's market? If you have visited this type of market, what did you like about it? What did you dislike?

5. What can you do to help keep family food costs down?

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For Further Study

- ◆ Visit an organic market or food store. Compare the cost of several organic fresh vegetables to regular fresh vegetables sold in a supermarket. What is the difference in cost? Analyze the advantages and disadvantages to buying organic food. When might you choose to buy organic food? Discuss your responses with the class.

- ◆ Compare prices and nutritional information for the following food products at a supermarket, discount store or warehouse club, and a convenience store: one gallon of 2 percent milk; one pound of bananas; a 64-oz. carton of orange juice; one loaf of wheat bread; an 18-oz. jar of peanut butter and your favorite jelly. Chart the data that you have collected. What conclusions can you draw from this information? Write a brief summary about your conclusions. Submit the summary and chart to your teacher.

- ◆ Compare the unit price and nutritional information of two national brands, two store brands, and, if available, two generic brands for three of your favorite food products. Chart the data that you have collected. What conclusions can you draw from this information? Share your findings with the class.

- ◆ My favorite milk: Use the nutrition labeling on fat-free, 1 percent, 2 percent, whole, chocolate-flavored, and strawberry-flavored milk to compare the calories per serving and percent Daily Value for carbohydrates, fat, protein, calcium, and vitamin A. Chart your data. Which would best meet your nutritional needs? Why? What accounts for the extra calories in the chocolate- or strawberry-flavored milk? Would you recommend either the chocolate- or strawberry-flavored milk for grade school children? Why or why not? Write a brief summary and submit it to your teacher.

- ◆ Make a collage of pictures from newspapers and magazines that advertise low-fat, low-carbohydrate, and low-sodium food products. Group pictures by USDA food groups from MyPyramid. Highlight the words that are used to describe the products. Identify the food products that have low-fat, low-carbohydrate, or low-sodium alternates.