

# NUTRITION FACTS LABELS – WHEN A PRODUCT NEEDS ONE AND HOW TO OBTAIN IT

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<b>Total Fat</b> 0.5 g	1%
Saturated Fat 0 g	0%
Trans Fat 0 g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0 mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 4 mg	1%
<b>Carbohydrate</b> 14 g	5%
Fiber 2.5 g	10%
Sugars 10 g	
<b>Protein</b> 1 g	
Vitamin A	1%
Vitamin C	16%
Calcium	1%
Iron	2%



## INTRODUCTION

Nutrition facts labels, or nutrition facts panels, provide detailed information about the calories and nutrients contained in a single serving of food. The information is provided in a standard label format to help consumers make informed food choices and compare similar products.

Generally, all foods intended for human consumption and offered for sale require a nutrition facts label, although there are a few exceptions and exemptions. Also, retailers may require nutrition facts labels on packaged products even if the food manufacturer is exempt under government regulations. When and where it is required, the food manufacturer is responsible for obtaining the nutrition facts data and displaying it in the appropriate format for their products.

Since the regulations covering nutrition facts labels can be very complicated and difficult to navigate, current or prospective food manufacturers often have questions about how to comply. This fact sheet aims to help small-scale food manufacturers become familiar with the basic regulatory requirements for nutrition facts labels and their format, components of a nutrition facts label, when they are required, how to file for an exemption, and how to obtain a nutrition facts label for their food or beverage products.

## BASIC REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS AND FORMATS FOR NUTRITION FACTS LABELS

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture - Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS) both regulate nutrition facts labels for food products that fall under their specific jurisdiction. USDA-FSIS regulates most meat, poultry, and egg products (fried, frozen, or liquid eggs), while the FDA regulates most every other food product including shell eggs. There are also nutritional labeling requirements for pet foods and livestock feeds, but this fact sheet only addresses foods for human consumption.

The nutritional information required on the labels of USDA-FSIS and FDA regulated products are nearly the same. Both require products to include nutrition facts labels except under certain exemptions found in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs).<sup>1</sup> These exemptions will be explained later in this fact sheet.

While FDA adopted updated rules in 2016, USDA hasn't finalized changes as of the date of this publication. Currently, the USDA allows manufacturers and meat packers (the ones commonly putting nutrition facts labels on meat and poultry products) to use either the 2016 FDA format or the 1990 USDA format. For this reason, this document will focus on the 2016 FDA nutrition facts label regulations and format requirements.

### DISCLAIMER

This publication is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice, nor is it intended to be a substitute for the services of a competent legal professional or regulatory oversight.

Figure 1. Standard Vertical



Figure 2. Dual Column Display, Per Serving and Per Container

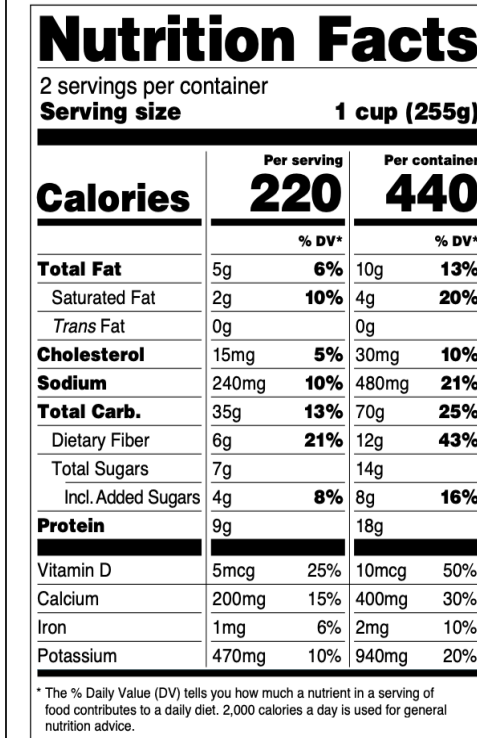


Figure 3. Tabular Format

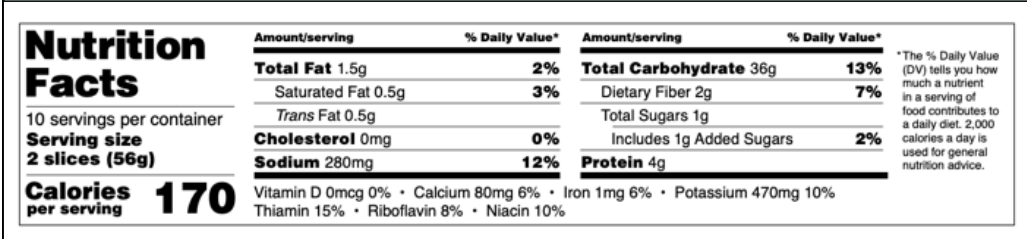
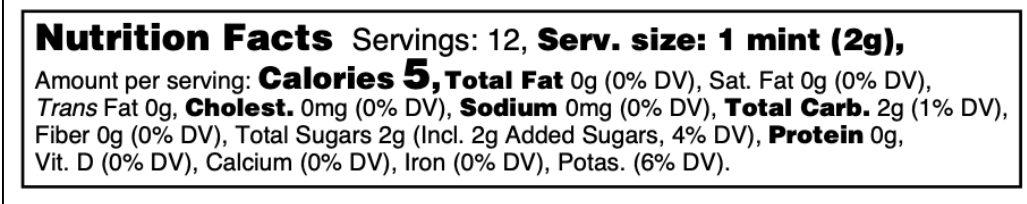


Figure 4. Linear Display for Small or Intermediate-Sized Packages



There are several accepted nutritional facts label formats for products intended for the general population 4 years of age and older depending on the product type and container size. Figures 1-4 show four of the more common nutrition facts label formats.<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 is the standard vertical nutrition facts label used when a product's container has multiple servings not commonly consumed in one sitting. Figure 2 is a dual-column display used when a product contains multiple servings but may be consumed in one sitting

(e.g., a bag of chips or a carbonated beverage). Figures 3 and 4 show special case formats where the food product container is too small for a standard vertical nutrition facts label. The producer can only use the linear display if the tabular format is too large for the specific package. For each of these formats, highlighted or bold text, relative or minimum type sizes, layout, order, and spacings for all of the required information is specified in regulations<sup>1</sup> and examples are given in reference documents.<sup>2,3</sup>

## COMPONENTS OF A NUTRITION FACTS LABEL

In all formats, the nutrition facts label includes information on serving size, servings per container, calories per serving, and detailed information about the major nutrients contained in a food product.

Serving size and servings per container are at the top of the label. Serving size is shown as a common household measure that is appropriate for the food (such as cup, tablespoon, piece, slice, or jar) followed by the metric amount in grams (g). The nutrition information is listed based on one serving of the food; however, some containers may also have information displayed per container or per package.

Regulations require the serving size to be based on the amount of food people typically consume rather than how much they should consume. These reference amounts customarily consumed (RACCs) in one sitting can be found in information from FDA and USDA guidance documents<sup>3</sup>. Examples of RACCs for some FDA-regulated products are listed in Table 1.

Directly below the serving size is calories in one serving (and possibly the entire container) from all sources (carbohydrate, fat, protein, and alcohol) in large, bold type.

The main section of the nutrition facts label lists the actual amount (in grams, mg, or mcg as appropriate) and percent daily value (%DV) in one serving for each of the following components: total fat, saturated fat, trans fat (no %DV); cholesterol (mg); sodium (mg); total carbohydrate, dietary fiber, total sugars (no %DV), added sugars; protein (no %DV); vitamin D (mcg); calcium (mg); iron (mg); and potassium (mg). The percent daily value (%DV) shows how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to an average recommended daily diet of 2,000 calories.

## IS A NUTRITION FACTS LABEL REQUIRED?

As mentioned earlier, all food products made for human consumption require a nutrition facts label unless an exemption applies. There are certain exemptions that food manufacturers and retailers can apply for under the FDA or USDA regulations.<sup>4</sup> Also, home-based food manufacturers operating in many states are usually exempt from nutritional labeling by state regulations.

FDA-regulated, low volume food products may be exempt from a nutrition facts label if the manufacturer employs fewer than 100 full-time employees and sells less than 100,000 units of the product in the U.S. within 12 months.<sup>5</sup> If a manufacturer qualifies for a low-volume product of a small business, a notice shall be filed annually for each product. However, if a person is not an importer and has fewer than 10 full-time employees, that person does not have to file a notice for any product with annual sales of fewer than 10,000 total units. More information on the FDA small business nutrition labeling exemption can be found in the references.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed (RACCs)<sup>3</sup>**

FDA
<b>Sauces, Dips, Gravies, and Condiments:</b>
Barbeque sauce - 2 tbsp
Dressings for salads -30 g
Major condiments
(e.g., catsup, soy sauce, and marinade, etc.) 1 tbsp or 15 ml
Minor condiments
(e.g., hot sauce, mustards, and Worcestershire sauce) 1 tsp or 5 ml
<b>Miscellaneous:</b>
Spices and herbs - ¼ tsp or 0.5 g if not measurable by tsp
<b>Nuts and Seeds:</b>
Nuts, seeds and mixtures all types - 30 g
Nuts and seed butters, pastes, or creams - 2 tbsp
<b>Bakery Products:</b>
Bagels - 110g
Breads - 50 g
Cakes (heavy, medium, or lightweight) - 125, 80, 55 g
<b>Vegetables:</b>
Fresh or canned chili peppers, jalapeno peppers, other hot peppers, green onion - 30 g
Pickles and pickled vegetables, all types - 30 g
All other vegetables without sauce: canned, or frozen - 130 g or 85 g



A similar USDA exemption exists for products produced by small businesses if the company employs 500 or fewer people or produces 100,000 pounds or less of the product. Also, certain products made from single-ingredient raw meat and poultry, or custom slaughtered are exempt from mandatory nutrition labeling.<sup>7</sup>

Any nutritional health claims included on food labels must meet strict regulatory approval.<sup>7,8</sup> Products can be deemed misbranded if the claims do not comply with requirements, so expert legal advice should be sought if planning to include any nutritional claims. Most importantly, if any nutrition content claim (e.g., sugar-free, reduced fat, high protein), health claim, or other nutritional information is provided on the label, or advertising, the small business exemption (for FDA or USDA) is not applicable for that product and it must have a nutrition facts label.

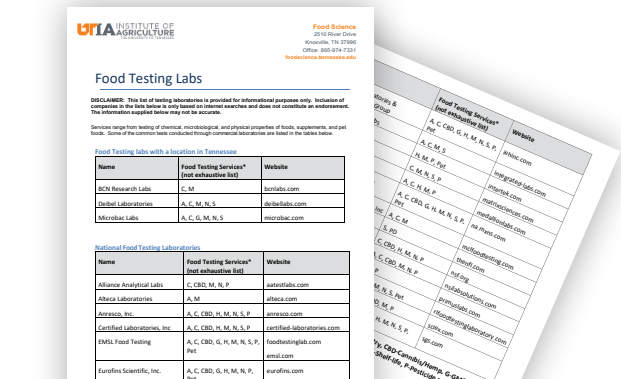
Many U.S. states have what are commonly referred to as “cottage food laws.” Cottage food laws are regulations that allow specific food products to be made within a home kitchen (rather than an inspected, commercial facility) and sold to the public within that state. In the state of Tennessee, home-made foods produced and sold only within the state may fall under Tennessee’s Food Freedom Act (TNFFA)<sup>9</sup>. The TNFFA states that any home-made food product that is considered non-TCS (not Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety) may be sold within the state with certain limitations and specific labeling information which does not require nutrition facts. More details of products that fall under Tennessee’s Food Freedom Act 2022 and requirements of the act can be found in the references.<sup>9</sup>

Food products sold through commercial retailers (e.g. grocery stores) even if exempt from regulations requiring a nutrition facts label may still need a nutrition facts label to meet the retailer’s standards. Large retailers often require nutrition facts labels (and UPC codes) for all products sold in their stores. If a retailer requires a nutrition facts label, then regulatory exemptions no longer apply and the product’s package will need to display a nutrition facts label in order to be sold by that retailer.

## REQUESTING A NUTRITION FACTS LABEL

Nutrition fact labels can be generated using two main methods. The first method is by calculation of nutrition facts using nutrition information for each ingredient in the formulation and the second method is via chemical analysis of the final product itself. The calculation method can only be applied if the nutritional value of the ingredients is not altered significantly during processing. For example, fermented products generally cannot use the calculation method and must be chemically analyzed.

Meat-based products can vary in fat content and usually require chemical analysis. Many commercial entities offer nutritional analysis or nutrition facts labels for food products using one or both methods. The calculation method is far less expensive than a chemical analysis, so most producers prefer that method if it is applicable to the product. See the online resources section at the end of this publication for an incomplete list of companies whose websites state they provide nutritional facts information.



The University of Tennessee, Food Science Department’s Process Innovation Laboratory also offers nutrition facts labels using the calculation method only. A nutrition facts label can be made using the product’s ingredients, formulation, and processing details. The Process Innovation Laboratory does not currently have the resources to chemically analyze a sample’s nutritional contents. When requesting a nutrition facts label through the University of Tennessee, it is important that clients provide all necessary information so a complete label can be calculated in a timely manner.

The use of unusual raw ingredients (e.g., raw ingredients like microgreens or specialty mushrooms, etc.) or fermented products (e.g., kombucha) may make a product ineligible for the development of a nutrition facts label using the calculation method. Before payment or submission of sample details, see the submission criteria in Table 2 and a mock example of submission information in Table 3. See the online resources section at the end of this publication for an incomplete list of companies whose websites state they provide nutritional facts information.

**Table 2. Information needed when submitting products for nutrition facts labels.**

1. **Ingredients by weight:**
  - grams and ounces
  - do not use tbsp, cups, “pieces,” fluid ounces, etc.
  - 1 fl oz does not equal 1 oz by weight for many ingredients
2. **Brand name of any purchased/formulated ingredients:**
  - e.g., Heinz Ketchup, Kroger Worcestershire, etc.
  - Alternatively, provide the nutrition facts from each ingredient’s label
3. **Package size, either in volume or weight:**
  - Volume, e.g., 16 fl oz mason jar or bottle
  - Weight, e.g., 12 oz bag
  - Link to container specs
  - All containers are referred to in fl oz, which is not equivalent to oz by weight
4. **Net weight or volume of product:**
  - 10 oz (283.5 g) in a 12 oz bag
  - 16 fl oz (474mL)
  - Should be based on the expected LOWEST fill weight
5. **Intended serving size:**
  - FDA/USDA bases serving size on what consumers customarily eat in one sitting
  - If providing volume, also include serving size weight barbecue sauce 2tbsp. (36g), dill pickle spears 1oz (28g / 2/3 spear), etc.)
6. **Full recipe and process description:**
  - Include initial and final batch weight if the product is cooked or dehydrated to remove water
  - Any other information impacting nutritional properties

**Online Resources:**

1. **Sample list of companies offering Nutrition Facts Labels** [foodscience.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2023/12/List-of-Food-Testing-Labs\\_2024.pdf](https://foodscience.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2023/12/List-of-Food-Testing-Labs_2024.pdf)
2. **Sample Submission Form from University of Tennessee** [foodscience.tennessee.edu/food-science-extension](https://foodscience.tennessee.edu/food-science-extension)

**Table 3. Example of Submission Information**

1. **Ingredients by weight:**
  - 1000 g Heinz Ketchup
  - 800 g brown sugar
  - 100 g apple cider vinegar
  - 80 g Worcestershire sauce
  - 50 g honey
  - 50 g hot sauce
  - 30 g salt
  - 30 g pepper
  - 30 g garlic powder
2. **Brand name of any purchased/formulated ingredients:**
  - Heinz Ketchup (nutrition label)
3. **Package size, either in volume or weight:**

Nutrition Facts	Amount/serving	% DV	Amount/serving	% DV
	Total Fat	0g	0%	Total Carb.
Sat. Fat	0g	0%	Fiber	0g
Trans Fat	0g		Total Sugars	4g
Cholest.	0mg	0%	Incl. 4g Added Sugars	7%
Sodium	180mg	8%	Protein	0g
Calories per serving	<b>20</b>		Vit. D	0%
			Calcium	0%
			Iron	0%
			Potas.	0%

**INGREDIENTS:** TOMATO CONCENTRATE FROM RED RIPE TOMATOES, DISTILLED VINEGAR, HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, CORN SYRUP, SALT, SPICE, ONION POWDER, NATURAL FLAVORING.

- 16 fl oz Plastic Bottle
  - Capacity is 17.37 fl oz
  - [uline.com/pdf/rs-24633-spfr.pdf](https://uline.com/pdf/rs-24633-spfr.pdf)
4. **Net weight or volume of product:**
    - NET WT. 16 oz 510g
  5. **Intended serving size:**
    - 2 tbsp, 36 g (based on FDA RACCs)
    - After weighing it out, 1 tbsp is 18 g
  6. **Full recipe and process description:**
    - Weigh out all ingredients (initial weight: 2270 g)
    - Mix all wet ingredients in a kettle (ketchup, vinegar, water, Worcester sauce, honey, tabasco)
    - Add dry ingredients (brown sugar, salt, pepper, garlic powder)
    - Bring to a simmer for 10 minutes
    - Bring to a boil (approx. 200F for 3 minutes)
    - Cool to 180F for bottling
    - Final batch weight: 2043 g
    - Bottle and invert for 3 minutes



## REFERENCES:

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9. TN Department of Agriculture. (2024) Tennessee Food Freedom Act (2022). Accessed from [tn.gov/agriculture/consumers/food-safety/tennessee-food-freedom-act.html](https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/consumers/food-safety/tennessee-food-freedom-act.html)



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