

Nutrition Basics Help Fight Child Obesity

With childhood obesity levels at an all-time high, parents, schools—even whole communities—are getting behind the movement to help young people eat healthier.

As you head down the supermarket aisle, registered dietitian Shirley Blakely says you should zero-in on two things:

- the Nutrition Facts label—tells the number of calories and percentage of a day’s worth of nutrients in one serving
- the ingredients on the label of all prepared and packaged foods—lists every ingredient that went into the product, with the predominant ingredient first, the next most prominent second, and so on in descending order

If the cereal your kids like has some type of grain, such as corn or oats, listed first, that’s a good sign. But if fructose, high fructose corn syrup, or sucrose—in other words, sugar—is listed first, that tells you that added sugars are taking the place of other, more nutritious ingredients. The FDA has also proposed to update the nutrition facts label and has proposed that “added sugars” information be included so that you can see how much added sugars are in a product.

But sugar isn’t always an additive. Some foods—fruits, for example—are naturally sweet without adding any sugar at all. If you check the Nutrition Facts label on canned or dried fruits that have no added sugar, you’ll still see sugars listed. That’s because the sugars in pineapple, raisins, prunes, and other fruits occur naturally.

The same is true for fresh apples, bananas, melons, carrots and other items on your grocer’s produce aisle, but they are not generally required to carry labels. If you want to know how many calories or



nutrients they have, you can look on the Internet.

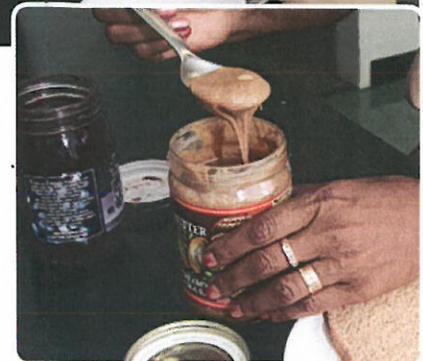
Blakely also says parents and kids should pay attention to portion sizes and make sure everyone in the family knows how to use the Nutrition Facts label to guide their food choices. Blakely says there are three things everyone should check when they read the label:

Serving size—one container isn’t necessarily one serving of the nutrients listed on the Nutrition Facts label; if you only want to eat one serving you can pre-measure your food and eat it from a plate or bowl instead of out of the container.

Percent Daily Value—tells what percentage of the recommended daily amount of each nutrient is in one serving of a food. Based on the amount of each nutrient recommendation for one day, 5 percent or less is low; 20 percent or more is high.

Nutrients—choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods. Try to get 20 percent or more of protein, fiber, and some essential vitamins and minerals (such as vitamin C and calcium) in a single serving; but limit your intake of saturated fats and sodium to 5 percent or less per serving of food. Strive for 0 *trans* fat, or *trans* fatty acids—this harmful fat raises your bad cholesterol (LDL) and lowers your good cholesterol (HDL).

Good nutrition at home is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to being healthy. With one third of daily calories being consumed outside the home, the FDA is moving forward with



calorie labeling on menus and menu boards for certain chain restaurants and similar retail food establishments, and on vending machines. The requirements would help ensure that consumers have more information when they make food choices outside of their homes.

For more information about how to live healthier, go to www.letsmove.gov.

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