

What the Label Doesn't Tell You

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It has been nearly 20 years since the government overhauled food labels. Since then, companies have come up with new schemes to trick consumers. And some older problems were never fixed the first time around.

Here's how the food label can trip you up...and what a new, improved label might look like.

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Snapshot

350 CALORIES Per Serving **14** SERVINGS Per Box

HIGH Saturated Fat **5 g**

HIGH Added Sugars **30 g**

MED Sodium **290 mg**

More Information on Side Panel

A food with 5 grams of saturated fat per serving shouldn't be allowed to boast that it has 0 grams of trans fat.

The government should require symbols that give shoppers a quick snapshot of the food's key nutrients.

The label shouldn't count polydextrose, maltodextrin, or similar isolated fibers as equal to the intact, natural fiber in whole grains, beans, or vegetables.

The claim should reveal what percent of the grain is whole.

If a food is made with coffee, caffeine, or guarana, the label should tell you how much caffeine is in a serving.



Any food that contains high-fructose corn syrup is not all natural.

Some foods make an immunity claim because they contain a vitamin or two. That's deceptive and shouldn't be allowed.

When an ingredient appears on the label or in the food's name, the label should reveal how much of the ingredient the food contains.

Many labels claim that a food or ingredient can "support," "enhance," or "maintain" your joints, bones, heart, breasts, prostate, digestive health, etc. Most claims aren't backed by much evidence.

Label Makeover

Current Label

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1/14 Cake (107g)

Servings per Container 14

Calories 350 Calories from Fat 180

Amount/serving	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 14g	22%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 290mg	12%
Amount/serving	% Daily Value*
Total Carbohydrate 53g	18%
Dietary Fiber 5g	20%
Sugars 36g	
Protein 4g	

Vitamin A 0% ● Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 4% ● Iron 15%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories: 2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g	375g
Dietary Fiber	25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 ● Carbohydrate 4 ● Protein 4

INGREDIENTS: ENRICHED BLEACHED FLOUR (WHEAT FLOUR, NIACIN, IRON, THIAMIN MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID), SUGAR, SKIM MILK, VEGETABLE OIL (PALM, SOYBEAN AND/OR COTTONSEED OILS), WATER, COCOA PROCESSED WITH ALKALI, EGGS, CORN SYRUP, HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, CHERRIES, WHITE GRAPE JUICE CONCENTRATE. CONTAINS 2% OR LESS OF EACH OF THE FOLLOWING: WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR, CARAMEL COLOR, POLYDEXTROSE, LEAVENING (BAKING SODA, SODIUM ALUMINUM PHOSPHATE, MONOCALCIUM PHOSPHATE), SALT, CORN STARCH, MONO- AND DIGLYCERIDES, NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS, POLYGLYCEROL ESTERS OF FATTY ACIDS, SODIUM ALGINATE, NATURAL COCOA EXTRACT, PROPYLENE GLYCOL MONO- AND DIESTERS OF FATS AND FATTY ACIDS, MALTODEXTRIN, GELLAN GUM, LACTYLIC ESTERS OF FATTY ACIDS, SOY LECITHIN, POLYSORBATE 60, SOY FLOUR, COFFEE. CONTAINS MILK, WHEAT, EGGS AND SOY.

Better Label

Grains: 2% whole

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1/14 Cake (107 g)

Calories in 1 serving 350

14 Servings per Box

Amount per serving	% Daily Amount*
Total Fat 14 g	High 22%
Saturated Fat 5 g	High 25%
Trans Fat 0 g	0%
Cholesterol 30 mg	10%
Sodium 290 mg	19%
Total Carbohydrate 53 g	18%
Fiber 3 g	12%
Added Sugars 30 g	High 120%
Protein 4 g	8%

Vitamin A 0% ● Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 4% ● Iron 15%

*% Daily Amount is based on 2,000 calories a day. 20% or more of the DA is HIGH. 5% or less is LOW. 50 mg caffeine per serving

Ingredient Facts

Major Ingredients: Sugars (sugar, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, white grape juice concentrate) (28%) • Skim milk • Refined bleached flour (wheat flour, niacin, iron, thiamin mononitrate, riboflavin, folic acid) • Vegetable oil (palm, soybean, and/or cottonseed oils) • Water • Cocoa processed with alkali (5%) • Eggs • Cherries (3%)

Contains 2% or less of: Whole wheat flour • Caramel color • Polydextrose • Leavening (baking soda, sodium aluminum phosphate, monocalcium phosphate) • Salt • Corn starch • Mono- and diglycerides • Natural and artificial flavors • Polyglycerol esters of fatty acids • Sodium alginate • Natural cocoa extract • Propylene glycol • Mono- and diesters of fats and fatty acids • Maltodextrin • Gellan gum • Lactylic esters of fatty acids • Soy lecithin • Polysorbate 60 • Soy flour • Coffee

Allergy Information: Contains MILK • WHEAT • EGGS • SOY

Calories and serving size should be in larger type.

Unnecessary information.

Calling it “% Daily Amount” would be more understandable.

The Daily Amount for sodium should be 1,500 mg. The current 2,400 mg is too high.

With no Daily Value for trans fat, added sugars, or protein, consumers don’t know how much to shoot for each day.

“Dietary fiber” should be called “Fiber” and should include only intact fiber from whole grains, beans, vegetables, fruit, and other foods. Polydextrose, maltodextrin, and similar carbohydrates should not count as fiber.

This information isn’t useful for most consumers.

The label should list only added sugars (from high-fructose corn syrup, table sugar, etc.), not the naturally occurring sugars in milk and fruit.

Many people don’t realize that this is ordinary refined white flour.

All-capital letters are hard to read.

If the food contains grains, the label should say what percent of the grains are *whole* grains.

The “% Daily Amount” lets consumers know how much of a day’s worth of trans fat, added sugar, protein, etc., each serving contains.

Red color and “High” warn consumers when a serving has at least 20 percent of the Daily Amount for saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, or added sugars.

Caffeine content is disclosed.

Consumers can see that when all the cake’s sugars are combined, they become the first ingredient.

Label should show percentages by weight of key ingredients, especially those that are good or bad for your health.

Bullets separate ingredients.

Minor ingredients and allergens are listed separately.