

Definitions for Nutrient Content Claims on Food Labels

Free: Food contains no amount (or trivial or “physiologically inconsequential” amounts). May be used with one or more of the following: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugar, and calories. Synonyms include without, no, and zero.

Fat-free: Less than 0.5 g of fat per serving

Saturated fat-free: Less than 0.5 g of saturated fat per serving, and less than 0.5 grams of trans fatty acids per serving

Cholesterol-free: Less than 2 mg of cholesterol and 2 g or less of saturated fat per serving

Sodium-free: Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving

Sugar-free: Less than 0.5 g of sugar per serving

Calorie-free: Fewer than 5 calories per serving

Low: Food can be eaten frequently without exceeding dietary guidelines for one or more of these components: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and calories. Synonyms include little, few, and low source of.

Low-fat: 3 g or less per serving

Low saturated-fat: 1 g or less of saturated fat per serving; no more than 15 percent of calories from saturated fat

Low-cholesterol: 20 mg or less and 2 g or less of saturated fat per serving

Low-sodium: 140 mg or less per serving

Very low sodium: 35 mg or less per serving

Low-calorie: 40 calories or less per serving

Lean and extra lean: Describe the fat content of meal and main dish products, seafood, and game meat products.

Lean: Less than 10 g fat, 4.5 g or less saturated fat, and less than 95 mg of cholesterol per serving and per 100 g

Extra lean: Less than 5 g fat, less than 2 g saturated fat, and less than 95 mg of cholesterol per serving and per 100 g

High: Food contains 20 percent or more of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient in a serving.

Good Source: Food contains 10 to 19 percent of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient in one serving.

Reduced: Nutritionally altered product containing at least 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than the regular or reference product. (Note: A “reduced” claim cannot be used if the reference product already meets the requirement for “low.”)

Less: Food, whether altered or not, contains 25 percent less of a nutrient or of calories than the reference food. Fewer is an acceptable synonym.

Light: This descriptor can have two meanings:

1. A nutritionally altered product contains one-third fewer calories or half the fat of the reference food. If the reference food derives 50 percent or more of its calories from fat, the reduction must be 50 percent of the fat.
2. The sodium content of a low-calorie, low-fat food has been reduced by 50 percent. Also, light in sodium may be used on a food in which the sodium content has been reduced by at least 50 percent.

Note: The term light can still be used to describe such properties as texture and color as long as the label clearly explains its meaning (e.g., light brown sugar or light and fluffy).

More: A serving of food, whether altered or not, contains more of a nutrient that is at least 10 percent of the Daily Value more than the reference food. This also applies to fortified, enriched, and added claims, but in those cases, the food must be altered.

Healthy: A healthy food must be low in fat and saturated fat and contain limited amounts of cholesterol (less than 60 mg) and sodium (less than 360 mg for individual foods and less than 480 mg for meal-type products). In addition, a single-item food must provide at least 10 percent or more of one of the following: vitamin A or C, iron, calcium, protein, or fiber. A meal-type product, such as a frozen entrée or dinner, must provide 10 percent of two or more of these vitamins or minerals, or protein or fiber, in addition to meeting the other criteria. Additional regulations allow the term healthy to be applied to raw, canned, or frozen fruits and vegetables and enriched grains even if the 10 percent nutrient content rule is not met. However, frozen or canned fruits or vegetables cannot contain ingredients that would change the nutrient profile.

Fresh: Food is raw, has never been frozen or heated, and contains no preservatives. Fresh frozen, frozen fresh, and freshly frozen can be used for foods that are quickly frozen while still fresh. Blanched foods also can be called fresh.

Percent fat-free: Food must be a low-fat or a fat-free product. In addition, the claim must reflect accurately the amount of nonfat ingredients in 100 g of food.

Implied claims: These are prohibited when they wrongfully imply that a food contains or does not contain a meaningful level of a nutrient. For example, a product cannot claim to be made with an ingredient known to be a source of fiber (such as “made with oat bran”) unless the product contains enough of that ingredient (e.g., oat bran) to meet the definition for “good source” of fiber. As another example, a claim that a product contains “no tropical oils” is allowed, but only on foods that are “low” in saturated fat, because consumers have come to equate tropical oils with high levels of saturated fat.

Source: Food and Drug Administration. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lab-nutr.html>. Accessed 5/01/09.