



EATING RIGHT: Confusing claims and the facts on fats

It seems just about every package in the grocery stores these days boasts some sort of health benefit on the front: light, low fat, high in calcium, good source of vitamin C, reduced calories, etc.

To prevent arbitrary claims from being plastered on food products, the Food and Drug Administration established strict guidelines on what each claim means. Below, the Chicago-based American Dietetic Association explains the requirements for foods to be labeled with some of the more common claims:

- "Low calorie" – Less than 40 calories per serving
- "Low cholesterol" – Less than 20 milligrams of cholesterol and 2 grams or less of saturated fat per serving
- "Reduced" – 25 percent less of specified nutrient or calories of the food's original variety
- "Good source of..." – Provides at least 10 percent of the daily value of a particular vitamin or nutrient
- "Calorie free" – Fewer than 5 calories per serving
- "Fat/sugar free" – Less than half a gram per serving
- "Low sodium" – Less than 140 milligrams per serving
- "High in..." – Provides at least 20 percent of the daily value of a specified nutrient
- "High fiber" – 5 or more grams per serving
- "Lean" (found on meat, poultry and seafood) – 10 grams of fat or less, 4.5 grams saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 3-ounce serving
- "Light" – One-third fewer calories or one-half the fat of the food's original variety
- "Healthy" – Decreased fat, sodium and cholesterol, and at least 10 percent of the daily value of vitamins A and C, iron, protein, calcium, and fiber

While the above claims are regulated by the FDA, other common claims such as "fresh" or "all natural" are not regulated, and therefore meaningless. If you want to be sure you are buying a pesticide-free or "natural" product, your best bet is to look for the Department of Agriculture's "organic" certification seal.

THE FACTS ON FATS

For anyone dieting, fat may seem like the enemy; but in fact, fat is vital to your health. Certain types of fat contain vitamins and compounds that help regulate blood pressure and heart rate. While too much fat can lead to obesity and heart problems, adequate amounts of the right kinds of fat actually can be beneficial.

The nutrition label heading for fats also features subheads listing the types of fats that are in each product. Knowing which fats are good and which are bad can be difficult to determine. The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, offers this clarification:

- **Saturated fats:** Saturated fat can increase LDL and risk of heart attack. It is solid or waxy at room temperature, which causes artery blocking buildup. This fat is found in animal products such as red meat, poultry and whole milk and also in tropical oils such as palm and coconut.
- **Trans fat:** Beginning in 2006, FDA required trans fats to be listed separately on food labels. Trans fat is created by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil to solidify it, which prevents products from spoiling quickly. Found mostly in prepackaged and fried foods, this fat actually increases your LDL or "bad" cholesterol, while also lowering your HDL or "good" cholesterol. It is important to note that if a product contains less than 0.5 grams of fat, the nutrition label will list "0 grams." So while a



product may list "0 grams trans fat," if the ingredient list includes "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated oil," trans fats are present.

- Unsaturated fats: These healthy fats help lower your LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, which can clog arteries, leading to heart disease and stroke.
- Monounsaturated: This type of fat is found in olive oil, avocados and nuts.
- Polyunsaturated: This is found in vegetable oils and soy.
- Omega-3 fatty acids: A type of polyunsaturated fat, omega-3s are found primarily in seafood and flax. They have been found to decrease the risk of coronary disease and stabilize heart rate and blood pressure.

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