



newsletter

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QUICK TAKES



Revealing Hidden Calories

Calories matter when you're trying to lose weight. Tracking daily calorie intake with a food journal or an online tracking tool is a proven weight-loss strategy.

You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to conclude that an ice cream sundae is loaded with calories. But you'll have to do a little detective work to find out just how many calories are on your daily plate. Luckily, there are a variety of resources available to help you with the task, including nutrition labels, books, recipes, Internet databases and smartphone apps. Yet it still helps to understand some basics. Your key clues in the hunt for hidden calories include:

- Always check the Nutrition Facts panel
- Learn to interpret front-of-the-box claims
- Look for calorie information posted online
- Remember, portion size really matters

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Interpreting Calories

When it comes to packaged foods, it should be easy to calculate how many calories you're consuming. By federal law, the number of calories is the first item listed on the Nutrition Facts label of all packaged foods. But calories are listed per serving, and that can be confusing.



Serving size for package labels is regulated, but the regulations leave some room for maneuvering. Few food manufacturers want to highlight high calorie counts in their products, so they often calculate the Nutrition Facts based on a serving size that's as small as possible. This strategy makes the calorie count seem lower and also minimizes the apparent content of fat, carbohydrate, sodium or other nutrients consumers try to limit. That is why the package of your favorite frozen enchiladas may show an appealing photo of a plate of enchiladas on the front and when you check the Nutrition Facts on the back you discover that the package contains two servings not one. This means you're eating double the calories listed on the label.

- Remember, when tallying a day's calories, you might have to multiply the calories of a particular food by the number of servings you actually eat.

Decoding Front-of-the-Box Claims

By law, food labels must be truthful. But sometimes they don't tell the whole story. For instance, the word "natural" doesn't mean anything about a food's nutritional content or health benefits, and it certainly doesn't mean low-calorie. "Fat-free" may tempt you into believing you're buying a lower-calorie food, but the actual number of calories may be high. Putting the "Organic" seal on a package is strictly regulated by the USDA. It describes how the food was produced and is not an indicator of calories, although a recent study found that many consumers do believe that organic foods have fewer calories than their non-organic counterparts.

- With all packaged foods, you must check the Nutrition Facts!

Soon to Be Posted on Menu Boards Near You – Calories!

Americans spend almost half their food dollars on foods made outside the home. Fortunately, many chain restaurants make nutrition information, including calorie counts, available on their websites or posted somewhere in the establishment. Soon, those calorie numbers should be even easier to locate thanks to Section 4205 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010. The Act requires chain restaurants with 20 or more locations to post calorie information "in a clear and conspicuous manner" for standard menu items on their menus and menu boards. The FDA is currently reviewing enforcement guidelines.

- Check the website or menu board for calorie counts before placing your order!