



UNDERSTANDING FOOD PACKAGING CLAIMS

When you see words such as “low sodium”, “sugar-free” and “low fat” listed on packaging, do you know their true meaning?

It’s important to understand what food packaging claims mean so that you can make the best decisions for you and your family.

Let’s dive a bit deeper into some common food packaging claims to make sure you have a good understanding.

The Basics

According to the FDA, three categories of claims can be used on food and dietary supplement labels.

Nutrient Content Claims

Nutrient content claims describe the amount of nutrients in a product, using the terms “free”, “high” and “low”. They may also compare the nutrient level in one food to another food by using terms such as “more”, “reduced” or “lite”.

Health Claims

Health claims describe a relationship between a food and a disease or health-related condition such as heart disease.

Structure/Function Claims

Structure/function claims describe the effect a nutrient has on a physiological function. For example, “Calcium builds strong bones” or “Fiber maintains bowel regularity”.



Deciphering the Claims

Low

The claim “low” can be used on many food labels. Below are the most common uses.

- **Low fat:** 3 grams of fat or less per serving
- **Low sodium:** 140 milligrams or less per serving
- **Very Low Sodium:** 35 milligrams or less per serving
- **Low Calorie:** 40 calories or less per serving

Free

“Free” is often used to express when a particular food element is not included in processing.

- **Fat-free:** Fewer than 0.5 grams of fat per serving
- **Sugar-free:** fewer than 0.5 grams of sugar per serving
- **Gluten-free:** Fewer than 20 parts per million of gluten
- **Sodium Free:** Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving and no ingredients containing sodium

Reduced or Less

These terms are used to compare that particular product to another.

- **Reduced calorie:** At least 25% less calories than the regular product
- **Reduced or Less Sugar:** At least 25% less sugar than the regular product
- **Reduced or Less Fat:** At least 25% less fat than the regular product
- **Reduced or Less Sodium:** At least 25% less sodium than the regular product

No Added

“**No salt added**” or “**unsalted**” means no salt was added during processing. The food may still contain sodium and will then also state “not a sodium-free food” on the label.

“**No added sugar**” means no sugar or sugar-containing ingredient was added during processing or packaging. The item may still contain naturally-occurring sugars.

Good Source

If one serving of food contains 10-19% of the daily value of a particular nutrient, it is considered a good nutrient source.

Excellent Source

If one serving of food contains at least 20% of the daily value of a particular nutrient, it is considered an excellent source of that nutrient.

Whole

There is no regulation or specific definition for the term “**whole**.” Typically this term is used to describe food items that are minimally processed or have little to no added ingredients.

It’s essential to look at the whole picture of a packaged food rather than one particular component. For example, if a product is labeled “low fat,” it may contain unhealthy amounts of other nutrients such as sugar and sodium. For a complete picture, it’s always best to look at the nutrition facts label and the ingredients list on your food packages.