

## Food Label Language Defined

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Provided by:



You're strolling down the crowded aisles of your grocery store with an already overflowing cart and a screaming child — the last thing you have time to do is flip over each package and study the Nutrition Facts Panel.

Maybe your shopping trips aren't quite this hectic, but reading labels still uses up valuable time. Isn't there an easier way?

One thing that may allow you to more quickly get the low-down on a packaged food is to become fluent in the meanings of all those phrases such as "reduced fat," "light," and "low sodium," that manufacturers like to display on the fronts of their packaging.

These expressions, which are called "nutrient content claims," are far from being vague and meaningless catch-phrases or slogans. In fact, they are precise descriptions of nutrient content and they've been set down by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

And if you know what these "code words" are trying to tell you, you'll be able to tell at a glance exactly how much of a nutrient (usually calories, fat, cholesterol, or sodium) is in that food, without having to squint at the Nutrition Facts Panel on the back.

Here are the phrases used in most of the nutrient content claims, along with what they mean:

### **Fats**

- "Reduced fat." At least 25 percent less fat than the regular version.
- "Light" (in fat). Half the fat of the regular version.
- "Low fat." 3 grams of fat or less per serving.

### **Calories**

- "Reduced calorie." At least 25 percent fewer calories than the regular version.
- "Light" (in calories). One-third of the calories of the regular version.
- "Low calorie." 40 calories or less per serving.

### **Sodium**

- "Low sodium." No more than 140 mg of sodium per serving.

### **Cholesterol**

- "Low cholesterol." No more than 20 mg of cholesterol and no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per serving.

### **Fat and cholesterol in meats**

- "Lean." Less than 10 grams of fat, less than 4.5 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 mg of cholesterol per serving.
- "Extra lean." Less than 5 grams of fat, less than 2 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 mg of cholesterol per serving.