

Daily Union Article

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Title: Translating Food Label Language

If you have recently completed your annual physical exam and related lab work, you know your blood pressure, weight, and blood work results. It is likely you received some recommendations from your doctor related to diet and health. A common recommendation is to lose some weight.

In your attempt to adhere to their advice, you head to the grocery store on a quest to restock your pantry with healthy food options. You look over the inventory carefully and find:

- The label on a can of pears that says there is “no added sugar”
- The words on a milk container that touts “high in calcium”
- A breakfast cereal product that claims to be “high in fiber”
- Salad dressing that is “lite” and cookies that have “fewer calories”

All of these nutrient claims imply that they are better products because of these qualities. However, navigating the mixed messages that often accompany these claims can be a challenge to even the most diligent label-reader.

A nutrient claim is a claim that describes the content of a food, including the amount of nutrients, calories, cholesterol or fiber but not in exact amounts. Commonly food products with these types of claims provide a quick comparison between similar foods on the front of their label.

You may wonder if you can trust these claims and the answer is yes, you can.

Under the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NELA) of 1990, the government set strict rules and definitions that a product must meet to make a nutrient claim or a health claim. If a product meets these strict criteria, the manufacturer can display certain approved claims about the food.

When you understand what the approved terms are and what they mean, you will be able to make smarter food choices. The NELA permits the label claims that describe the level of a nutrient in a food. These nutrient content claims describe the level of a nutrient or dietary substance in the product, using terms such as free, high, and low or they compare the level of nutrient in a food to that of another food, using terms such as more, reduced, or lite.

In the chart provided you can see what each of the regulated content claims mean:

### Definitions of Nutrient Content Claims

Nutrient Content Claim	What the Claim Means Per Serving
High (rich in, excellent source)	20% or more of the Daily Value
Good	10% to 19% of the Daily Value
More	Contains at least 10% more of the Daily Value for vitamins, minerals, protein, dietary fiber, or potassium.*
Light	Has at least 1/3 fewer calories or 50% less fat.* If more than half the calories are from fat, fat content must be reduced by 50% or more.
Less or fewer	Has 25% less of a nutrient or of calories
<b>Calorie Claims</b>	
Calorie free	Less than 5 calories
Low calorie	40 calories or less
Reduced calories	At least 25% fewer calories*
<b>Sugar Claims</b>	
Sugar free	Less than 0.5 gram sugars
Reduced sugar	At least 25% less sugar*
<b>Fiber Claims</b> (If food is not low in total fat, the label must state total fat in conjunction with the fiber claims.)	
High fiber	5 grams or more
Good source of fiber	2.5 grams to 4.9 grams
More or added fiber	At least 2.5 grams more*
<b>Sodium Claims</b>	
Sodium free or salt free	Less than 5 milligrams sodium
Very low sodium	35 milligrams of sodium or less
Low sodium	140 milligrams of sodium or less
Reduced sodium	At least 25% less sodium*
Light in sodium	At least 50% less sodium
Salt free	Less than 5 milligrams sodium
<b>Fat Claims</b>	
Fat free	Less than 0.5 gram fat
Low fat	3 grams or less total fat
Reduced fat	At least 25% less fat than the regular version
<b>Saturated Fat Claims</b>	
Saturated fat free	Less than 0.5 gram saturated fat and less than 0.5 gram trans fatty acids
Low in saturated fat	1 gram or less saturated fat & no more than 15% calories from saturated fat
Reduced saturated fat	At least 25% less saturated fat* and reduced by more than 1 gram fat
<b>Note: Trans fat has no FDA-defined nutrient content claims.</b>	
<b>Cholesterol Claims</b>	
Cholesterol free	Less than 2 milligrams cholesterol and 2 grams or less saturated fat
Low cholesterol	20 milligrams or less cholesterol and 2 grams or less saturated fat
Reduced cholesterol	At least 25% less cholesterol and 2 grams or less saturated fat*
<b>Lean Claims</b>	
Lean	Contains less than 10 grams total fat, 4.5 grams or less saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams cholesterol
Extra lean	Contains less than 5 grams total fat, less than 2 grams saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams cholesterol
*compared to the reference, or regular, food this would replace	

Source: Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, "Nutrient Claims on Food Labels", publication HGIC 4061; <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic>

Sometimes foods are labeled with a generic label of "healthy." In order for this to be legally claimed, it must be a food that is low in fat and saturated fat and contains

limited amounts of cholesterol and sodium. It can't contain any nutrient that increases risk of disease. There are a few exceptions to this rule, however; certain fresh, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables as well as certain cereal-grain products.

Knowing what nutrition content claims mean will make it easier for you to select foods that meet your needs for a healthier and more nutritionally packed diet. When you implement what the doctor recommends for improving your health and well-being, you will find that the numbers they collect at your next appointment will be improved.

For more information on food labels and health claims, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!