



figuring out food labels

CONCEPTS:

In 1990, the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act went into effect. The United States Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration developed the food label system so consumers would have the tools to make informed food choices. Reading food labels and measuring serving sizes is an integral part of a healthy diet. Having the correct information will help adolescents make healthy, informed food and beverage choices.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to calculate serving sizes by using various foods to accurately display serving sizes.
- Students will learn to read a variety of food labels by filling in a nutrition label worksheet.
- Students will hypothesize which cereals and snacks are healthier by using their prior knowledge.
- Students will learn to make healthy food choices by analyzing the nutritional information of a variety of foods.

MATERIALS:**ACTIVITY 1: So, What Is a Serving Size Anyway?**

- *Figuring Out Food Labels* PowerPoint or overheads
- Cereal boxes (a different type for each table of four students). Choose a variety from sugary cereals to what are considered healthy choices.
- Bowls—one per student
- Measuring cups
- *Cereal Serving Size* student handout
- *What is a Serving?* student handout

ACTIVITY 2: Food Labels—What Do They Mean?

- *How Healthy is Your Snack Choice?* student handout
- Empty food packages
- *Healthy Snack Group Hypothesis* student handout (one per group)
- Calculators



TEACHER PREPARATION:

Use the *Figuring Out Food Labels* PowerPoint or prepare overheads of PowerPoint. Copy enough *Cereal Serving Size*, *What is a Serving?*, and *How Healthy is Your Snack Choice?* student handouts for each student. Copy one *Healthy Snack Group Hypothesis* student handout for each group of four students. Have a variety of cereal options for groups to investigate (sugary cereals as well as “healthy” options). Gather empty snack packaging, enough for each student to have a different package. To have a variety of packages have students bring in their favorite snack package.

ESTIMATED TIME:

50 minutes

INTRODUCTORY SET:

Cereal is a popular breakfast item and it is easy to eat more than one serving per sitting. Ask students what their favorite type of cereal is and why? With all the cereal boxes in the front of the room ask them to make a quick hypothesis on which cereals are the highest in sugar and which are the highest in fat depending on the serving sizes.

ACTIVITY 1: SO, WHAT IS A SERVING SIZE ANYWAY?

1. Show and discuss student objectives.
2. Divide students into groups of four.
3. Distribute one cereal box per group and one bowl per person in each group.
4. Make sure that each group receives a different type of cereal with different serving size suggestions and different caloric values.
5. Ask students to put as much cereal in the bowl as they would normally eat for breakfast.
6. Distribute *Cereal Serving Size* student handout.
7. Instruct students to look up the serving size of their cereal from the nutrition label listed on the box.
8. Ask students to measure how many serving sizes were in their bowl of cereal by using the measuring cups provided (according to the information listed on the nutrition label). Once the number of servings has been determined, students should figure out how many calories they are consuming in their bowl of cereal by calculating the number of servings (in their bowl) by the number of calories per serving. For instance, if a student had 2.5 servings of cereal, and each serving has 130 calories, multiply the number of servings (2.5) by the

number of calories (130). This person would have a bowl of cereal worth 325 calories (and that is without the milk)!

9. Now let's get a chance to compare cereals. Have a volunteer from each group bring their cereal box up to the front of the room. Have the volunteers organize themselves in order from least to greatest for the following items:
 - Serving size
 - Calories per serving
 - Total fat grams per serving
 - Carbohydrate grams per serving
 - Sugar grams per serving
 - Protein grams per serving

Conclusion:

Ask how many students went over the serving size? Where do students find out information about the foods they eat? How many students review serving size information about the foods they buy or eat? Will students review serving size information if they didn't before? Also provide students with a copy of the *What is a Serving?* student handout to take home. Discuss the handout if necessary.

ACTIVITY 2: FOOD LABELS—WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

1. Ask students why we have food labels? What is their purpose?
2. Provide background information on the food label. Food labels help us find the nutritional content of the foods we eat. They help us make informed food choices. Food labels are required by law to be on all prepackaged food items.
3. Ask how many students know how to read a food label? Show students using the *How To Use a Food Label* PowerPoint slide or overhead.
4. Divide students into groups of four or five.
5. Distribute various empty snack packages and *How Healthy is Your Snack Choice?* student handouts to each student. Each student should have one snack package.
6. Instruct students that their goal is to report back to the class which snack at their table is the healthiest and why. First each group will make a hypothesis using the *Healthy Snack Group Hypothesis* student handout. They will use one sheet as a group to rank items from least to greatest in the areas of calories, fat, sodium, sugar, fiber, and calcium per serving. They are not to look at the food labels. Once this is complete have the students put it off to the side. They will compare their hypotheses to reality near the end of the activity.

7. Direct each student to fill out the nutrition information from their snack package onto the *How Healthy is Your Snack Choice?* student handout. Demonstrate how to read a Nutrition Label by using the *How to use a Food Label* slide in the PowerPoint or overhead.
8. Direct each student to determine how many calories, fat, sodium, sugar, fiber, and calcium per serving are in the snacks selected.
9. Once each group member has calculated the information for their snack food, they will need to determine which snack is the healthiest and why. Have students revisit their hypothesis sheet and put the correct answers as to how the snacks measure up on their paper under the "reality" column.

Conclusion:

Ask each group to pick a spokesperson to share with the class which snack their group picked and why. Which group had the healthiest snack? Now that the students are able to read and understand food labels, how many students will consult the nutrition information before selecting snacks? How many will consider serving sizes before dishing up at each meal?