



## **SIMPLE CHANGES THAT MAKE A BIG IMPACT: LABEL READING**

Information about what to look for when reading food labels can be confusing and frustrating – which is why many of us do not bother trying. Simplicity is best when it comes to deciphering food labels. Share this information with your employees and empower them to improve their health, energy levels and well-being one bite at a time.

### Reading the label to compare proteins and carbohydrates

- Studies have shown us that even slight increases in protein intake in addition to reducing carbohydrates can help us to be healthier, have more energy and feel better.
- Look at the amount of protein in grams compared to the amount of carbohydrates when reading food labels.
- Ideally, foods should have a 1:1 ratio of carbohydrates to proteins, and a minimum of 5:1 carbohydrates to proteins.
- For example, a food with 20g carbohydrates should have at the very least 4g protein to be considered a healthier option.
- Foods like crackers, chips and cereals usually far outweigh this suggestion with a carbohydrate ratio of 10:1.
- This is certainly not a perfect metric, but it places more focus on avoiding carbohydrate overload, which can be preventative of a host of health issues.

### What to know about sugar content

- Sugar has been described as “candy for cancer cells” and fuels heart disease, obesity and tumor growth.
- Sugar is addictive and accelerates inflammation and aging in the body.
- The simplest step is to avoid consuming added sugars outside of the natural sources found in fruits and vegetables.
- Try to avoid eating foods with more than 10g of sugar per serving.
- Eat dried fruits sparingly or in small portions, as they are packed with sugar.

### Looking at the big picture

- If you cannot pronounce the ingredients on a food label or the wording seems more like a science experiment, it is best to find another food choice.
- Ask yourself, would your great-great grandmother recognize this food? If not, make a different nutritional choice that she would recognize.

### Why focus on reading labels?

- The food choices your employees make will impact their productivity at work. The more carb-heavy or sugar-laden their choices, the less energy they will have a few hours later.



- Healthy foods will positively influence employee alertness during the workday. For example, if your employees operate heavy equipment or drive vehicles while working, it is imperative for safety purposes that they are properly fueling their bodies.
- Reading a nutrition label and focusing on calories alone will not necessarily create healthy habits. It is important to educate employees about the proper balance of the foods they eat.
- There is a great deal of information contained in food labels and this simple approach will empower your employees to better evaluate the foods they eat.

### Using this information in the workplace:

#### Low cost or no cost

- Include this information as a monthly topic in wellness-themed publications.
- Make this topic part of a quarterly challenge focused on simple changes that last.
- Tailor this information for a lunch-and-learn presentation, possibly sampling some ideal foods that demonstrate the properties mentioned in this topic.
- Ensure the nutritional options offered in your workplace (vending machines, office meals or company meetings) are in compliance with this topic.

#### Incentive ideas

- Peer-based recognition: make small gift cards available to staff that want to reward their colleagues for making healthier eating decisions.
- Subsidize the cost for healthier options in vending machines or dining areas of your workplace.
- Designate healthier options in vending machines and cafeterias with a green label or sticker. Provide entry cards for employees to collect the labels/stickers and have a monthly grand prize drawing for those that fill their entry cards.

Good nutrition is a vital component to happy, healthy and productive employees who contribute to a healthier bottom line. Give your employees the tools they need to best care for themselves and their families.

### Recommended reading:

*Eat Move Sleep* by Tom Rath | website: [www.eatmovesleep.org](http://www.eatmovesleep.org)

For more information on this topic, or suggestions on potential speakers to bring into your organization, contact the Wellness Council of Indiana Helpline at (317) 264-2168. Stay tuned for more ***Simple Changes that Make a Big Impact***. Download your copy of this handout at: [http://www.wellnessindiana.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Simple-Changes\\_Label-Reading.pdf](http://www.wellnessindiana.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Simple-Changes_Label-Reading.pdf)