

Food Label Detectives: Uncover the Secrets in Your Snacks!

Mission Briefing (Introduction - 10 minutes)

Welcome, Food Detective! Today, your mission is to decode the secret messages hidden on food packages – the Nutrition Facts labels! Why is this important? These labels tell us what's inside our food, helping us make smart choices to fuel our amazing bodies. Have you ever looked closely at a food label? What do you think it tells us?

Activity 1: Cracking the Code (Label Scavenger Hunt - 20 minutes)

Gear up with your food packages and magnifying glass (if you have one)! Let's become expert label readers.

1. **Pick one food package.** Find the Nutrition Facts label.
2. **Serving Size Sleuth:** Find the 'Serving Size' and 'Servings Per Container'. Why is this the first thing to look at? If you eat the whole package, how many servings is that?
3. **Calorie Counter:** Locate the 'Calories'. What are calories? How does the serving size relate to the calories listed?
4. **Nutrient Investigation:** Scan for these key nutrients: Total Fat, Sodium, Total Carbohydrate (including Dietary Fiber and Total Sugars), and Protein. Discuss what each of these might do for your body. Are there any nutrients you think are better to have more of? Less of?
5. **Vitamin & Mineral Hunt:** Look for vitamins and minerals listed (e.g., Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, Potassium). Why are these important?
6. **Ingredient Line-Up:** Find the ingredients list. What do you notice about the order of ingredients? (Hint: They are listed by weight, from most to least!) Are there any ingredients you recognize? Any that are unfamiliar?

Adult guidance: Discuss each component. For a 12-year-old, focus on general understanding rather than specific daily value percentages unless they show keen interest.

Activity 2: The Great Food Face-Off! (Compare & Contrast - 20 minutes)

Now that you're a Code Cracker, let's put your skills to the test!

1. **Choose two similar food items** (e.g., two different brands of cereal, two types of yogurt, two kinds of crackers).
2. **Lay their Nutrition Facts labels side-by-side.**
3. **Detective Challenge:** Compare them!
 - Which one has a smaller/larger serving size?
 - Which has more/fewer calories per serving?
 - Compare the Total Fat, Sodium, and Total Sugars. Which one is lower in these?
 - Compare Dietary Fiber and Protein. Which one is higher?
 - Look at the ingredient lists. Are they very different?
4. **Make Your Case:** Based on your investigation, if you wanted to choose the option that might be

better for providing sustained energy or has less added sugar, which one would you pick and why? There's not always a single 'right' answer; it's about making an informed choice based on what you're looking for!

Activity 3: Kitchen Innovator - Design Your Dream Healthy Snack! (Creative Application - 30 minutes)

This is where you become a food creator! Think about one of your favorite snacks.

1. **Choose Your Snack:** What is it? (e.g., cookies, chips, a packaged pastry)
2. **Brainstorm a 'Healthier' Twist:** How could you make this snack a bit healthier, but still delicious? Consider:
 - Reducing sugar or unhealthy fats?
 - Adding fiber (like whole grains, fruit, or nuts)?
 - Using more natural ingredients?
 - Boosting vitamins or minerals?
3. **Invent Your Snack:** Give your new, improved snack a cool name!
4. **Design the Label:** On your paper, draw the packaging for your new snack. Then, create a mock Nutrition Facts label for it.
 - List the (imagined) ingredients for your healthier version.
 - Estimate what the serving size might be.
 - Think about how your changes would affect the calories, fat, sugar, fiber, and protein. Make your best guess for these values on your mock label. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it should reflect the changes you made (e.g., if you reduced sugar, the sugar value should be lower than the original snack).
5. **Present Your Innovation:** Explain your new snack, why you made the changes you did, and how its mock nutrition label reflects those healthier choices.

Debriefing (Conclusion & Reflection - 10 minutes)

Fantastic work, Food Detective and Kitchen Innovator!

- What was the most surprising thing you learned about food labels today?
- How will knowing how to read food labels help you in the future?
- Can you think of a time this week you could use your new label-reading skills (e.g., at the grocery store, picking a snack)?

Remember, reading food labels is a superpower that helps you make informed choices for a healthy and energetic life!

Extension Activities (Optional)

- **Deep Dive Research:** Pick one unfamiliar ingredient from a food label and research what it is and why it's used.
- **Pantry Raid:** Go through your kitchen pantry or fridge and pick three more items. Read their labels and tell someone what you've learned about them.
- **% Daily Value Detective:** Learn about % Daily Values (%DV) on labels. How can these help you understand if a food is high or low in a nutrient? (This might involve a quick internet search with adult help).
- **Track Your Day:** For one meal, try to find the nutrition labels for everything you eat and see how

the nutrients add up!