

# Nutrition Basics Help Fight Child Obesity

**W**ith childhood obesity on the rise, parents, schools—even whole communities—are getting behind the movement to help young people eat healthier.

FDA nutrition expert Shirley Blakely, the mother of two grown kids and a registered dietitian, says healthy eating at home and school begins at the grocery store.

As you head down the supermarket aisle, Blakely says you should zero-in on two things:

- the Nutrition Facts label—tells the number of calories and percentage of a day’s worth of nutrients in one serving
- the ingredients on the label of all prepared foods—lists every ingredient that went into the product, with the predominant ingredient first, the next most prominent second, and so on in descending order

Ingredients in prepared foods are listed in descending order of predominance. If the cereal your kids like has some type of grain listed first, that’s a good sign. But if fructose, high fructose corn syrup, or sucrose—in other words, sugar—is listed first, you’d best leave that item on the store shelf because added sugars are taking the place of other, more nutritious ingredients.

And sugar isn’t always an additive. Some foods—fruits, for example—are naturally sweet without adding any sugar at all. If you check the Nutrition Facts label on canned or dried fruits that have no added sugar, you’ll still see sugars listed. That’s because the sugars in pineapple, raisins, prunes, and other fruits occur naturally.

The same is true for fresh apples, bananas, melons, and other items on your grocer’s produce aisle, but they don’t carry labels because they’re completely unprocessed. If you want to know how many calories or nutrients they have,



you’ll have to look on the Internet or ask in the produce section of your grocery store.

Blakely also says parents and kids should pay attention to portion sizes. Her advice: put just one serving on each person’s plate. And make sure everyone in the family knows how to use the Nutrition Facts label to guide their food choices. Blakely says there are three things everyone should check when they read the label:

**Serving size**—one container isn’t necessarily one serving; make sure you’re eating only one serving by pre-measuring your food and eating it from a plate or bowl instead of out of the container.

**Percent Daily Value**—tells what percentage of the recommended daily amount of each nutrient is in one serving of a food. Based on the amount of each nutrient recommendation for one day, 5 percent or less is low; 20 percent or more is high.

**Nutrients**—try to get 20 percent or more of protein, fiber, and some essential vitamins and minerals (such as vitamin C and calcium) in a single serving; but limit your intake of saturated fats and sodium to 5 percent or less per serving of food. Strive for 0 trans fat, or trans fatty acids—this harmful fat raises your bad cholesterol (LDL) and lowers your good cholesterol (HDL).



Good nutrition is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to being healthy. For more information about how to live healthier, go to [www.letsmove.gov](http://www.letsmove.gov)!

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