

What does 2,000 calories a day look like?

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Pull out a package of food from your kitchen cabinet, refrigerator, or freezer and take a close look at the **Nutrition Facts** label. Towards the bottom of this panel, following the asterisk (*), is written: "Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet". Your personal values may be higher or lower than 2,000 depending on your caloric needs.

Calories, food energy, are a measure of the energy that food supplies to the body. They are also a measure of the energy used by the body. When the energy supplied by the foods we eat matches the energy expended in daily activities, we maintain a steady weight.

The information contained on the food label provides recommended intakes for important nutrients. Amounts for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium are expressed as upper limits. Try and keep your totals for the day equal to or under the amounts listed. Amounts for total carbohydrates and dietary fiber are averages for a 2000 calorie diet. Percent daily values do not change from one product to the next. They also appear on the Nutrition Facts panel of most foods. Use this information to guide you in your food selections.

Do you know what a nutritious 2,000 calorie diet might include? 2,000 calories serves as a standard reference point which approximates the calorie needs of many adults. In real life, on a day to day basis our needs and intake will probably vary.

Consider this food for a day:

breakfast-

- 1 hard cooked egg; 2 slices of whole wheat toast and a small apple

snack-

- low fat plain yogurt (8 oz.) and a pear

lunch-

- sliced turkey (2 oz.) and cheese (1 ½ oz.) sandwich on whole wheat bread with lettuce and tomato (1/2 cup) , carrot and celery sticks (1/2 cup),

snack-

- 2 graham crackers and a cup of skim milk

dinner-

- baked skinless chicken (3 oz) with brown rice (1 cup), spinach salad (1 cup) topped with sliced cucumber (1/2 cup) and peaches (1/2 cup)

Totals for the day: 2 ½ cups of fruit, 2 ½ cups of vegetables, 3 cups of milk, 5 ½ ounces from the meat & bean group and 6 ounces from the grain group.

Keeping in mind that in addition to balancing energy in and out, healthy eating means striving to eat foods which provide all the nutrients we need, along with achieving energy balance. When thinking about the sample menu, ask yourself the following:

- Would this amount of food leave you feeling hungry or fill you up?
- How do the portions mentioned compare to what you would normally eat?
- Which meal of the day is your largest? Your smallest?
- Do you skip meals? When and Why?

- Are your meals colorful? (Skittles and M&M's don't count.)
- Would you eat the sample menu or would you make substitutions?
- Do you eat meatless meals or meals in which meat is stretched by using other ingredients?
- What type of milk do you use?
- Do you pay attention to the calories and nutritional information in the beverages you consume?

Consider whether or not you would like to make a change in your daily eating pattern. If so, what would you change and how would you do it?

There is a lot of information on a Nutritional Facts label. This is only one small piece of the information given.

Additional information can be located at

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/foodforday.pdf>

<http://www.fda.gov/food/labelingnutrition/consumerinformation/ucm078889.htm>

(Adapted from Christine Parshall, Program Associate, UNH Extension Program, Cheshire County)

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