

There are too many people counting calories and not enough people counting chemicals.

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PINCH OF WISDOM

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Why you must read ingredient labels

Are you just beginning your health journey and don't know where to start? Here's an easy entry point — start by reading ingredient labels. In this month's Pinch of Wisdom, I'm going to break down the importance of reading ingredient labels, how to purchase packaged foods wisely, and ultimately, what ingredients you should be avoiding.

In a perfect world, your diet will consist only of nutrient-dense whole foods and you'll avoid anything that comes in a package and processed in a factory. In real life, this is highly unlikely. So, in these real-life circumstances, let's empower you with the information to make smart purchases when grocery shopping.

Let it be said that not all packaged foods are created equal. Chips are a perfect example. You can purchase chips with three ingredients: potatoes, salt, and olive oil or you can purchase chips with twenty-five ingredients, including vegetable oil,

PINCH OF SALT

NUTRITIONAL
THERAPY
PRACTICE

maltodextrin, monosodium glutamate, natural and artificial flavor, dextrose, artificial color (yellow 6, yellow 5, and red 40), lactic acid, citric acid, sugar, disodium inosinate, and disodium guanylate.

The first package of chips was Boulder Canyon, the second was Doritos. For many on their health journey, a simple chip with three ingredients may be just fine as a snack from time to time. On the other hand, for many, a chip with multiple artificial flavors and ingredients may cause unwanted inflammation and sensitivities that compound and eventually lead to illness and disease. So where do we begin?

Let's start with a general rule of thumb: make sure you can pronounce and recognize each ingredient listed on the label. So, that's to say, if you can't pronounce an ingredient or if you don't know what the ingredient is, put it back on the shelf and continue on. This rule will help guide you in purchasing the best-quality packaged foods until you're able to investigate each ingredient listed and determine if it's right for you.

The most common ingredients to stay away from include gums (e.g. guar gum and xanthan gum), refined sugars

(e.g. high-fructose corn syrup and sucralose), carrageenan, "natural" flavors, and artificial colors. If you're interested in learning more about the why behind each of these, the Environmental Working Group has a food score database that will help you navigate the potential health effects of these processed and artificial ingredients.

A note about refined sugars — they're hidden everywhere! I have included a list of the most common names of hidden sugars so you know what to look out for (scroll down for the entire list). With that being said, if you're following the general rule of thumb mentioned above, it'll be fairly easy to avoid these hidden sugars because you'll know what to look for.

Ultimately, the focus should be on consuming whole foods, even if they do come in a package i.e. Sargento snack packs, certain brands of hummus. Choosing food items with clearly recognized ingredients on their labels will ultimately guide you in purchasing the best-quality foods to nourish and support your body.

Small Changes, Big Results

- If you can not pronounce or do not recognize the ingredient, do not buy the product. Avoid products containing High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS).
- Select 90% of your groceries from the perimeter of the grocery store. The most unhealthy food tends to be located in the aisles.
- Replace sweet and carbonated drinks with water.
- Replace cereal with overnight oats or greek yogurt & granola.
- Replace processed packaged snacks with whole fruits, veggies, or nuts.

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Names of Refined Sugars

- barley malt
- beet sugar
- brown sugar
- buttered syrup
- cane juice crystals
- cane juice solids
- cane juice
- caramel syrup
- carob syrup
- concentrated fruit juice
- corn syrup
- corn syrup solids
- date sugar
- dehydrated cane juice
- dehydrated fruit juice
- dextran
- dextrin
- dextrose
- diatase
- diastatic malt
- disaccharides
- ethyl maltol
- fructose
- fruit juice crystals
- fruit puree
- galactose
- glucose
- glucose-fructose
- glucose solids
- golden syrup
- high-fructose corn syrup
- honey
- invert sugar
- lactose
- malt
- malt extract