



## How to read nutrition labels to select healthy products in 5 steps

- The order of the list of ingredients and applying the 5-20 rule are strategies to identify which alternatives are most beneficial.

Going grocery shopping and trying to choose products that align with healthy eating can be an overwhelming experience. When faced with a huge variety of brands and presentations, how do you know which are the healthiest choices?

The key to making the best purchasing decisions regarding the nutritional content of foods and beverages lies in the nutrition labels. These boxes detail the ingredients used in the preparation of the products and the proportions contained in each package, as well as the nutrients (macronutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins and fats; micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals) each serving provides.

In order to read labels correctly, it is necessary to know the meaning of the terms that appear on them, in addition to knowing what information to look for. Carolina Villalobos, nutritionist of the Costa Rican food and beverage company FIFCO, explains how to read nutrition labels in five steps:

1. **Review the list of ingredients:** Ingredients are listed in descending order according to the amount contained in the product. The first three are those found in the highest proportion. If sugar or saturated fats appear in the first positions, it is better to opt for another product..

2. **Consider the serving size and portions per package:** The serving size is the suggested amount a person should consume on a single occasion. The label details the nutrients contained in that specific serving. It is critical to pay attention to the number of servings per package, as some products contain more than one serving. In that case, if the entire package is consumed, the nutritional information should be multiplied by the total number of servings.

3. **Calories and source of calories:** Calories indicate the amount of energy provided by the product. However, it is important to analyze where they come from. For example, in 100 calories of beans we find many nutrients such as protein, which provide fiber, vitamins and minerals, and in 100 calories of candy we will have very few nutrients, mostly sugar. As a general rule, it is considered that a serving with 400 calories or more offers a high caloric intake, while 100 calories or less is moderate.

These estimates are based on the calculation that an average adult person needs to consume around 2,000 calories per day, although this requirement may vary according to gender, age and level of physical activity of each individual, among other factors.

4. **5-20 nutritional value rule:** The 5-20 rule is useful for evaluating whether a product is low or high in certain nutrients. A Daily Value (DV; or Nutrient Reference Value (NRV) of 5% or less indicates low content, which is ideal for nutrients such as fat, sugar and sodium. On the other hand, a DV of 20% or more suggests a high content, which is favorable in the case of vitamins (C, D, B12, among others), minerals (such as calcium, iron and potassium), protein and fiber.

5. **Sodium, fat and sugar content:** To maintain a healthy diet, it is advisable to select products with less than 140 milligrams of sodium, less than 1 gram of saturated fat and less than 10 grams of sugar per serving. These limits help control the intake of these nutrients, which in excess can be detrimental to health.

A careful review of this information will allow us to find important differences between two or more products that at first glance may seem very similar. For example, in the beverage segment, FIFCO has made a commitment to offer its buyers a wider variety of reduced sugar alternatives.



As a result of this effort, overall, the sugar content of an average FIFCO beverage was reduced from 10.45 grams per 250 milliliters in 2022 to 10.34 grams per 250 milliliters in 2023. The company's goal is to further reduce that figure to below 10 grams by 2027. At the same time, innovations in the product development process have made it possible to expand the portfolio of soft drinks, energy drinks and alcoholic beverages that are totally free of added sugars.

Similar measures have been applied to the food portfolio. Musi and Musmanni stores offer zero-fat *melcochon* bread, and both the Kerns brand canned tomato paste and the traditional Ducal whole and ground beans are made with no added sugar. These characteristics can be seen by reviewing the nutritional labels of the different presentations.

“As a company in the food and beverage industry, we take very seriously our responsibility to offer products that complement a healthy lifestyle, in which nutrition plays a key role. Today we also want to invite consumers to empower themselves in their purchasing decisions, take the time to review how the products that are part of their daily diet are made and choose those that are most beneficial to their health,” said Maria Pía Robles, FIFCO's Corporate Relations Director.

### **About FIFCO**

FIFCO is a beverage and food company with 116 years of history, comprised of 6,323 employees, and with operations in Costa Rica, Central America, Dominican Republic, Mexico and the United States, 5 manufacturing plants and 15 distribution centers. It has 3 business divisions that include Florida Bebidas (food and beverages), Florida Hospitality (real estate sector) and Florida Retail (retail sales). It exports to 10 countries around the world and has a portfolio of 2,000 products.