

Ross' Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter Premier Issue

Get ready to experience a refreshing approach to health and fitness that you won't find on television infomercials or in tabloid health magazines. My name is Ross Harrison and I welcome you to the premier issue of the Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter. I am a Lifestyle Enhancement Specialist, Certified Personal Trainer, Nutritional Consultant, and a Strength and Conditioning Specialist. My publication will provide you with interesting information that you can use to significantly improve your exercise and nutrition programs. Don't be surprised if you find that many of your notions about optimum health are challenged. The ideas and concepts presented here are based on years of research by relatively unknown but highly respected fitness and nutrition experts and my experience as a personal trainer for over ten years. You will see how to apply my knowledge and experience to your own situation. What you may find refreshing as you read this and subsequent issues is that there is no 'one program fits all' mentality here. This is because your input is instrumental in the design and content of this publication. I will focus on the issues that are important to you.

Consider me as an alternative to a typical fitness trainer. My goal is not to mold you into some idea of what I think you should be. I am sincerely interested in helping people to take responsibility for reaching their own health and fitness goals. YOU control the content by sending me comments and ideas about what interests you and what you want to accomplish. Get ready to expand your horizons as I take your input and provide you with responses that clarify your understanding and encourage you to think about health and fitness differently than you have before. Your questions are not only encouraged, but are necessary to make this project work. I respect your time and effort to suggest topics for articles and will address as many as I can within the limitations of this text. You may also include ideas for new sections or recurring columns that you would like to see in future issues.

Although this introductory issue of the Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter follows a looser format, subsequent issues will generally look like this:

- An introduction, which will discuss the main theme of the current newsletter
- The question and answer section, where your specific questions and concerns will be addressed
- The featured article, which will go into some depth about a particular health or fitness topic
- A wrap up to conclude the current newsletter and preview the next one

You can expect to receive the Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter around the 1st and 15th of each month, but this could change depending on the level of interest and questions received.

* Any information you submit will be kept anonymous, unless you specifically want to have your name included with your question or suggestion. My goal is to receive enough input and suggestions to provide me with content for multiple future issues. This will also allow me to take

related concerns from more people to create content around specific themes. This works much better than just throwing together a lot of information about many different topics.

As for the questions and topics, anything related to health or fitness is fair game, although try to ask more specific questions for the Q&A section to keep the responses shorter. Suggested topics may include but are not limited to subjects about nutrition, supplements, stretching, posture, bone and joint health, improving athletic performance, exercise psychology, fat loss, health and fitness research, and gyms. Also, I know the impact that television and the media have on our ideas about health and fitness. I especially want to address questions about anything you have read, seen on TV or heard in a conversation or on the radio. The Precision Health and Fitness Newsletter will allow you to separate the hype, myths, and hidden manipulative marketing agendas in mass media from factual, research based and professionally acknowledged information. This is one of the most common problems in health and fitness today and a frequent cause of confusion or frustration for many people who are sincerely making efforts to improve their overall health. It is also a central theme in the following article.

Featured Article

5 Tips to Help You Better Understand Food Labels Part 1

I was inspired to write this article by one of my personal training clients who expressed frustration in trying to understand some of the information on food labels. You can have the best intentions of picking up foods to help you reach your health and fitness goals, but still end up buying foods that sabotage your success, because the labels make them sound healthier than they really are. I will address five of the most common sources of confusion and misleading advertising found on food labels to enable you to make more informed decisions when shopping.

Tip 1: Read the ingredients list

The ingredients list is an important source of information on a food label, because it tells you what is in the food and helps you determine about how healthy a food *really* is. Unfortunately, the ingredients list often goes overlooked, probably because there are many unfamiliar terms. There are 2 main things to understand about the ingredients list: the ingredient order and the ingredients themselves.

The ingredients are always in order from the ingredient that weighs the most to the one that weighs the least. While this does not mean that the first ingredient contains the most calories, it does tell you the primary ingredients that make up the food and gives you an idea of the overall health of the food. For example, if a package says it includes whole grains (which is good), but the first ingredient listed is bleached enriched whole wheat flour (not a whole grain) and the first whole grain is listed halfway down the list, you can determine that only a small amount of the carbohydrates are actually whole grains.

As for the ingredients themselves, you have probably noticed a lot of strange ingredients on the list, especially towards the end of the list. These items are usually 1 of 3 things: added micronutrients (vitamins & minerals), spices, or artificial ingredients (flavor enhancers, colors,

or preservatives). Although these ingredients generally occur in small quantities, they significantly impact your health. As a general rule, nutrients and spices are healthy, while artificial ingredients should be avoided as much as possible.

Of course the problem with reading the ingredients is that very few people actually understand the names of everything on the list, so it can be difficult to determine what you are looking at. For example cyanocobalamin, which may sound bad, is actually another name for vitamin B-12. Since it would take way too long explain all the ingredients in an article, I will just ask you to send me questions about any ingredients you want to know more about. In this article I will focus on the most important ingredients to avoid for good health and improved fat loss.

One of the most common and unhealthy ingredients found in many foods is “partially hydrogenated” oil. After any food is consumed, the body must be break it down into smaller parts before it can be used. Hydrogenation is a process that alters fat molecules so they are difficult for the body to break down and use. This makes hydrogenated oil unhealthy and it should be avoided as much as possible. If you have to buy hydrogenated products, purchase the brands that list another oil before the hydrogenated oil on the ingredients list.

When discussing unhealthy carbohydrates, you probably already know to limit consumption of sugar, especially refined sugar (sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, etc.). Another less known type of carbohydrate to avoid is any flour/grain that has been “bleached.” Bleaching is a process that strips nutrients out of the ingredient. Companies try to make these ingredients sound better by making them “enriched.” Enriching adds some nutrients to the ingredient, but products in their natural state (whole grains) are still healthier than enriched products.

A well-known ingredient to avoid is MSG or monosodium glutamate, but this is a case where trying to avoid MSG and actually avoiding it are two different things. A nutritional label may list MSG or monosodium glutamate, but it might be listed as “Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein” or even “natural flavors” instead. “Natural flavors” means any added flavor that comes from something that can be found in nature. Since MSG can be made by breaking down proteins, it can be called a natural flavor. The good news for avoiding MSG is that it is most commonly found in foods that have other unhealthy ingredients and you will not find it in raw/natural products without added ingredients (fruit, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, etc.).

The last ingredients I will point out to avoid are “nitrates” or “nitrites,” which are generally found in processed meat products (especially bacon and ham). These ingredients are believed to be carcinogenic (cancer causing) and products containing them should be consumed sparingly. In many cases, alternatives without nitrates or nitrites are available, but you may have to go to a natural/health food store.

There are of course many other unhealthy ingredients, but these are some of the biggest offenders. Also, if you avoid foods with these ingredients, you will probably be avoiding a lot of the other unhealthy ingredients as well.

Tip 2: Understand the serving size

The number of calories in a serving can be important, but you also have to look at the serving size. If a package says “only 100 calories per serving,” it is usually unlikely that you will only eat one serving. This is especially true for chips, cookies, and other so called “junk food”. Many packages will list a serving size as 1 or 2 cookies or 5-10 chips or crackers. Realistically, most people will eat more than a serving at a time. When looking at a product, try to estimate how much you would realistically eat at one time and how many calories that would be. Knowing how many calories you would eat at one time is much more important than knowing the number of calories is in a serving on the package.

Tip 3: Percentage of fat and percentage of calories from fat are not the same thing:

It is common, especially with meats, to see labels advertise their products as 90-99 % fat-free. These labels are designed to make you think a food contains a low amount of fat, but unfortunately this number refers to the percentage of weight that is fat, not the percentage of calories. The percentage of calories from fat is the number that matters and it will be very different from the percentage of fat. For example, a food that is 95 % fat-free can typically have about 40% fat calories. This is because there are many ingredients in food such as water and nutrients that have weight but do not add calories to the food. Also, 1 gram of fat has over twice as many calories as 1 gram of carbohydrate or protein.

The good news is that food labels now have the calories from fat listed on the label by the total calorie per serving number. If you want the percentage of calories from fat you will have to divide the fat calories by the total calories. You can usually get a close estimate by looking at the numbers. Keep in mind that the percentage does not tell you anything about how healthy or unhealthy the fat is. This is important, because if you are buying a product that contains healthy fats, such as salmon, then a high percentage of calories from fat is actually good.

Finding the percentage of calories from fat is very useful for comparing products that are known for having unhealthy fats, such as meat, cheese, or anything with partially hydrogenated oil near the top of the ingredients list. This will help you make choices that minimize your intake of unhealthy fats. An added benefit to looking at the percentage of calories from fat is that regardless of the serving size, the percentage will always be the same and you can make a direct comparison between products.

Part 2 will discuss different labeling terms such as “lite” and “reduced”. I will also explain “net carbs” and the important relationship between carbohydrates and insulin.

WRAP UP:

I hope you enjoyed the first issue of the Precision Health and Fitness Newsletter and found it to be informative and interesting. It is now up to you to submit questions, suggestions, and comments. With your participation it will only get better from here.

Look for the next issue to be out on November 1st,

Ross

P.S. I want to send out a special thanks to Michael Medearis who helped edit this premier issue.