How to read a label

Serving Size
Take note of the amount of food shown as a serving. This may not be the amount you are eating, but it is the amount containing the nutrient values listed.

Calories
It is not necessary to count calories on a daily basis, but it is important know where your calories are coming from, which foods are high or low calorie, and approximately how many calories you need for weight control. Ultimately, **calories do count and contribute to weight gain or weight loss.**

Protein
Protein contains 4 calories per gram. Adequate protein is needed to provide the body with nitrogen for anabolic reactions and to prevent loss of skeletal muscle. Eating a protein source in each meal also helps reduce hunger throughout the day. Lean protein foods with low saturated fat content are best for weight and cholesterol management. Meat, fish, and poultry each contain about 7 grams of protein per ounce (by weight). Low fat dairy, eggs, and legumes are also good sources of protein.

Total and Saturated Fat
Fat contributes more calories than protein or carbohydrate with 9 calories per gram. Fat is essential for proper insulation and hormonal activity. However excess fat from the wrong sources can mean excess calories, resulting in weight gain.   A diet low in saturated fat is recommended to maintain healthy cholesterol levels and reduce risk of heart disease. Choose meats, dairy, and convenience foods with two grams (or less) of saturated fat per serving.

Carbohydrates
Carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram. They are primarily a source of energy. Carbohydrates can be broken down into simple and complex based on their processing methods. Sugars, sweets, pastries, fruits, starchy vegetables, sweetened beverages, rice, cereal, grains, and pasta all contain carbohydrates. Try to encourage foods that are high in fiber which contribute vital vitamins and minerals.