

# FOOD LABEL LINGO: MAKING SENSE OF TRICKY TERMS

Some food labeling terms are straightforward; however, some terms can be downright misleading, confusing or give a food a “health halo” that it does not truly deserve. Here is what you need to know to be informed when it comes to reading food labels!

## TERMS FOR SUGAR AND CARBOHYDRATE

**No Added Sugar** means that no sugars were added during the processing of a food, but the food can contain some forms of sugar that naturally occur in the food. Example: Lactose is a naturally occurring sugar in milk. If a food item is made with milk, the label will include the carbohydrate that comes from milk under “total carbohydrates” and “sugars”, but it will not be considered an added sugar.

**Added Sugar** refers to simple sugars that are added during the processing of foods packaged as sweeteners (*such as table sugar*), sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices. They do not include naturally occurring sugars that are found in milk, whole fruits and vegetables.

If it is a single ingredient food, like honey or maple syrup, the label does not have to list “added sugar”, but if honey is added to a product it must be listed under added sugar.

### Honey

FDA labeling defines honey as “syrupy substance that bees make as food from the nectar of plants or secretions of living parts of plants and store in honeycombs”. Mixtures of honey & other sugars cannot be called honey and must list ingredients. Honey is a combination of mostly fructose and glucose.

What about bee-free vegan options? Technically these products cannot be labeled “honey”, but can be referred to as “honee”, bee-free nectar, pear nectar and so on.

**Maple Syrup** is made from the sap of certain maple trees. There are different grades of pure maple syrup, however, the bottom line is that sucrose is the most prevalent form of sugar in maple syrup. If maple sugar is modified, ingredients must be listed.

**Cane Juice, Organic Cane Juice Crystals, Raw Cane Crystals** are all simply different terms for sucrose (*a combination of glucose and fructose*) which is extracted from sugar cane. The same holds true for terms like “organic sugar beet juice” which is sugar derived from sugar beets.

**Brown Sugar, Organic Brown Sugar** are a combination of sugar and molasses which makes for a moist sugar. Commercial brown sugar contains from 3.5% molasses (*light brown sugar*) to 6.5% molasses (*dark brown sugar*) based on total volume.

## Nutrition Facts

10 servings per container  
**Serving size** 1 cup (55g)

Amount per serving  
**Calories** 165

	% Daily Value*
<b>Total Fat</b> 1.5g	<b>2%</b>
Saturated Fat 0.5g	<b>3%</b>
Trans Fat 0g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 0.5g	
Monounsaturated Fat 0.5g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 180mg	<b>8%</b>
<b>Fluoride</b> 0g	
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 21g	<b>8%</b>
Dietary Fiber 2g	<b>7%</b>
Soluble Fiber <1g	
Insoluble Fiber 1g	
Total Sugars 8g	
Includes 6g Added Sugars	<b>12%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 10g	
Vitamin D 3mcg (80IU)	15%
Calcium 170mg	13%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 140mg	3%
Vitamin C 10mg	11%
Thiamin 0.3mg	25%
Niacin 3mcg	19%
Vitamin B <sub>6</sub> 0.4mg	25%
Biotin 6mcg	20%
Folate 260mcg DFE (120mcg folic acid)	65%
Vitamin E 6mg	40%
Phosphorus 112mg	9%
Iodine 15mcg	10%
Zinc 7mg	17%
Manganese 0.3mg	13%

\* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Calories per gram:  
 Fat 10 · Carbohydrate 4 · Protein 3

**Sugar-free** means “no sugar”, but it does NOT mean that the food item is carbohydrate-free or calorie-free.

*For example, many commercial brands of sugar free cookies have about 15-20 grams of carbohydrate and 100-130 calories per serving. This is not a “free” food whether you are concerned with blood sugar control or weight management.*

**Sugar Alcohols** are a category of sweet carbohydrate that occur naturally in certain fruits and vegetables, but some are man-made. Sugar alcohol is added to processed foods because they have about ½ the calories as regular sugar and do not promote cavities. However, because they are partially resistant to digestion, they can cause bloating, gas, and diarrhea especially with higher concentrations.

**Net Carbs and Low Impact Carbs** are purely marketing terms and do not have a formal FDA definition. In general, these terms refer to the amount of carbohydrate in a food after subtracting all the fiber and sugar alcohols from the total carbohydrate in order to market a product lower in carbohydrate.

**Made with real fruit.** If you are buying a juice, make sure it is made with 100% fruit juice. Juice beverage, juice cocktail and juice drinks are combinations of water, sugar and some fruit juice.

*Here at H3 we suggest eat your fruit rather than to drink it, so that you get the benefits of fiber and volume to help with weight management.*

**Good Source of Fiber** = 2.5 to 4.9 grams of fiber per serving

**High Fiber** = at least 5 grams of fiber per serving

## TERMS FOR FAT

**Fat free** = less than 0.5 grams fat per serving

**Low fat** = 3 grams of fat or less per serving

**Low saturated fat** = 1 gram of fat or less per serving

**Reduced Fat** = at least 25 % fewer grams of fat than the regular product

## TERMS FOR CALORIES

**Calorie free** = less than 5 calories per serving

**Low calorie** = less than 40 calories per serving

**Reduced calories** = at least 25 % fewer calories than the regular product

## TERMS FOR SODIUM

**Sodium free or salt free** = less than 5 mg of sodium per serving

**Very low sodium** = 35 mg of sodium or less

**Low sodium** = 140 mg of sodium or less

**Reduced sodium** = at least 25% less sodium than the regular version





## TERMS REFERING TO HOW A FOOD WAS GROWN, RAISED OR HANDLED

**“Clean” foods or Clean Eating** is more than a food term, it is embraced as a lifestyle, but there is no one universal definition. Technically the word “clean” is defined as being free from dirt, marks, or stains; morally uncontaminated, pure, innocent. When it comes to clean eating, the possible interpretations are endless and can refer to any or all of the following: *Consuming a whole foods diet, foods prepared from scratch, organic, non-GMO, vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, as well as, foods that are considered to be ethically and morally sound.*

**Gluten Free** is defined by the FDA as less than 20 ppm (*parts per million*) for the unavoidable presence of gluten in foods that carry this label. That is the lowest level that can be consistently detected in foods using valid scientific analytical tools. This level is consistent with those set by other countries and international bodies that set food safety standards. Foods that are inherently gluten-free, for example bottled spring water, fruits and vegetables, and eggs can also be labeled “gluten-free” provided any gluten that came in contact with the food is less than 20 ppm.

**Grass-Fed-** Perhaps “grass-fed beef” is a misnomer? All cows are grass-fed until the final 4 to 6 months leading up to harvest, during which they may be grass-finished or grain-finished.

Grass-finished beef contains modestly higher levels of some vitamins and minerals compared to grain-finished beef. Grass-finished beef can contain up to double the amount of omega-3 fatty acids compared to grain-finished beef (*approximately 70 milligrams compared to 35 mg, respectively, for 3.5 oz raw serving of 90/10*). However, the overall omega-3 content in any beef is considered low compared to fish (*especially certain cold-water fatty fish that contain over 1000mg of omega-3s*) or marine algae sources.

**Local, Locally Grown** does not have a formal definition and is not defined by a specific geographic distance. Local can refer to one’s community, city, state, region, or country. It is possible that a locally grown food may taste better and be fresher, but it does not guarantee that it is healthier or mean that it was organically farmed.

**Natural** is a term that is considered to mean that nothing artificial or synthetic (*including all color additives regardless of source*) has been included in, or has been added to, a food that would not normally be expected to be in that food. This term does not address food processing or manufacturing methods, such as thermal technologies, pasteurization, or irradiation.

USDA allows the use of the term “natural” to be used in meat and poultry labeling on products that contain no artificial ingredients or added color. The product must be minimally processed, and the label must explain the use of the term natural. *For example: “no added coloring, minimally processed.”*

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**Non-GMO, Non-Genetically Modified Organism**, is described by The Non-GMO Project (*an independent, non-profit organization that offers a third-party non-GMO verification*) as a product that is produced without genetic engineering and its ingredients are not derived from GMOs. The Non-GMO butterfly stamp on food labels signifies a product is Non-GMO Project Verified according to standards.

The Food and Drug Administration (*FDA*) does not use the terms “genetically modified” or “genetically modified organism” (*GMO*) when referring to foods derived from genetically engineered plants. FDA recommends terms such as “not bioengineered,” “not genetically engineered,” and “not genetically modified through the use of modern biotechnology.” Because the term “genetically modified” can encompass any alteration to the genetic composition of a plant, including alterations through traditional hybridization or breeding techniques, that term could apply to most cultivated food crops since most food crops are the product of selective breeding.

“GMO free” claims are not legally or scientifically defensible. Because such a large percentage of crops are “GMO”, there is an ongoing risk of contamination of non-GMO crops due to cross-pollination by their GMO counterparts. This risk makes it difficult to claim that any product is 100% GMO-free.

Surprisingly, it is possible for a Non-GMO Verified food to contain “artificial” ingredients. Artificial does not mean that an ingredient has been genetically modified, it means that it is not found in nature but synthesized by humans in a lab.

**Organic foods** and ingredients are regulated by the National Organic Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (*USDA*) and farmers and businesses must follow specific program standards.

**There are three levels of organic claims for food:**

- **100-Percent Organic:** Products that are completely organic or made of only organic ingredients qualify and can use the USDA Organic seal.
- **Organic:** Products in which at least 95 percent of its ingredients are organic qualify and can use USDA Organic seal.
- **Made with Organic Ingredients:** These are food products in which at least 70 percent of ingredients are certified organic. The USDA organic seal cannot be used but “made with organic ingredients” may appear on its packaging.

*For more details go to:*

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/publications/content/whats-behind-organic-seal-organic-labels-explained>

## RESOURCES

**US Food & Drug Administration:**

<https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-education-resources-materials/new-nutrition-facts-label>

**National Honey Board:** <https://www.honey.com/about-honey>

**Hendren, Sarah. The Meat of the Matter. Food & Nutrition Magazine:**

FoodandNutriton.org volume 9, issue 2, 2020.

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/>

**Voluntary Labeling Indicating Whether Foods Have or Have Not Been Derived from Genetically Engineered Plants: Guidance for Industry. FDA. Revised March 2019**

<https://www.fda.gov/media/120958/download>



**Nutrition Facts**

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