

The Nutrition Exchange with Alyssa Weber, RDN, CD

When I go to the grocery store I try to buy healthy foods but I see so many words and phrases written on food packages and I get confused. Can you explain what words such as ‘light’ or ‘natural’ really mean? It would make grocery shopping much easier.

**Sincerely,
Health Conscious but Confused**

Dear Health Conscious,

Reading food labels can be confusing, so I'm glad to hear that you are asking questions! Many times, brightly colored, over-the-top packaging can be misleading. What does it all really mean? I will explain some words and phrases that are commonly seen at the grocery store and hopefully that helps to clear some things up for you. My best advice for you though is to flip the package over and look at the nutrition facts and ingredient list. That is where you will find out what is really in the food you are consuming. A word of caution, just because a food has any of the following terms on it does not automatically make it healthy.

LIGHT: A food contains less than half the fat or sodium of a comparable product or 1/3 fewer calories.

LOW CALORIE: 1/3 fewer calories than its original version.

NATURAL: A very broad term. It has not been given an actual definition by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA allows “natural” to be on meat and poultry

labeling if it has no artificial ingredients or added color and the product must be minimally processed. The label must also explain the use of the word “natural”, for example: no added coloring or minimally processed. Regulations are fairly lenient for foods labeled “natural”.

ORGANIC: Must contain at least 95% organic ingredients with no synthetic growth hormones, antibiotics, pesticides, biotechnology, synthetic ingredients or irradiation used in production or processing.

REDUCED SODIUM: At least 25% less sodium than its original version.

LIGHT IN SODIUM OR LIGHTLY SALTED: At least 50% less sodium than its original version.

LOW SODIUM: Contains 140 milligrams of sodium or less per serving.

VERY LOW SODIUM: Contains 35 milligrams of sodium or less per serving.

SALT/SODIUM FREE: Contains less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving.

NO ADDED SALT: No salt is added during processing, but the food may not be salt/sodium free unless stated.

GOOD SOURCE OF FIBER: A food contains 10-19% of the recommended daily value of fiber per serving. Be aware of the source of fiber though as not all sources of fiber are created equal. Fiber from whole foods is much more beneficial for your health than fiber that comes from additives.

CONTAINS WHOLE GRAINS: This does not mean you are eating a 100% whole grain food. It simply means that the food you are eating contains some whole grains, no matter how small the amount is. Instead, look for foods labeled “100% whole grain” which means it is made from all whole grains.

MULTIGRAIN: Contains more than one type of grain. This does not guarantee it is a whole

grain, unless the food is marked as a whole grain or a whole grain is listed as its first ingredient.

ENRICHED: Nutrients are added to foods to replace those lost during food processing. B vitamins, for example, are lost when wheat is processed into white flour, so these nutrients are later added back.

FORTIFIED: Foods have nutrients added to them that weren't there originally. Milk, for example, is fortified with vitamin D, a nutrient that helps you absorb milk's calcium.

These terms are only a few of those that can be found on food labels. I encourage you to do further research if you are interested in digging deeper. I hope this information helps make your next grocery store trip less confusing!