

Living With Arthritis Blog | Friday, August 18

**Misleading Food Labels**

Sticking to the perimeter of the store, where healthier whole foods are displayed, is your best bet when shopping for an anti-inflammatory diet. But it’s hard to avoid packaged foods altogether – especially when many labels promise everything from a slimmer figure to better health. Here are some common health claims you’ll see on labels, and the truth behind them.

**The claim: High fiber**  
**The truth:** Products carrying the “high fiber” claim contain at least 5 grams of fiber per serving. But manufacturers sometimes process dietary fiber out of a product and then add processed fiber, so it’s not as healthful as it seems. What’s more, even seemingly nutritious products like yogurt with supplemental fiber may have a lot of added sugar, says Alicia Romano, clinical registered dietitian at Tufts Medical Center in Boston.  
**What you can do:** Choose products with bran, oats or other whole grains, and check the sugar content. Ingredients including inulin, polydextrose or maltodextrin suggest fiber is added.

**The claim: Low-fat**  
**The truth:** Items labeled “low-fat” must contain fewer than 3 grams of fat per serving. But if you’re trying to lose weight, fat is only one part of the equation. If the ingredients include refined grains, added sugar or high-calorie fillers, the product may be less nutritious and no better at helping with weight loss than the full-fat version.  
**What you can do:** Research shows that having some fat in your diet is good, but when you’re scanning labels, look for “unfats,” suggests Romano, including polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats, which are healthier than saturated fats. Avoid trans fats altogether.

**The claim: No added sugar**  
**The truth:** Whether sugar is added or not, a food may sport a hefty dose of the sweet stuff, which adds calories and can lead to inflammation. Manufacturers often [replace sugar with substitutes](http://www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/arthritis-diet/foods-to-avoid-limit/sugar-substitutes.php) that have the same effects, such as honey, molasses or corn syrup, says registered dietitian Bonnie Taub-Dix, author of *Read It Before You Eat It* (Plume, 2010). Even “all natural” fruit juice is full of naturally-occurring sugars that can send blood sugar levels soaring.  
**What you can do:** Look at total grams of sugar in the nutrition facts label. Anything above 15 grams is best left on the shelf.

**The claim: Antioxidant-rich**  
**The truth:** Although scientists are increasingly recognizing that certain foods have powerful anti-inflammatory properties, they don’t know what levels of antioxidants are beneficial. Plus, isolating a particular antioxidant, like vitamin C, rules out the synergistic effects of foods’ other nutrients, says Romano.  
**What you can do:** Eat a variety of antioxidant-rich whole foods, including a rainbow of deeply hued fruits and vegetables.