



BalanceWorks® Newsletter

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Decoding Supermarket Labels

We try to eat healthy, to cook homemade meals, and make smart choices at the grocery store. However, we are inundated by so many labels and terms each time we enter the store that making healthy choices can be overwhelming.

What is the difference between organic and natural? Is reduced fat or light a better option for me? What do the numbers on the produce stickers mean?

It's time to decode some of the most common supermarket labels and terms, so you can make informed choices while shopping.

Meat, Poultry, and Eggs

Cage-Free

This is currently not a regulated term and there is no 3rd party regulation. However, the term cage-free usually applies to egg-laying hens and implies that the hens are not raised in cages, but does not necessarily mean that they have access to outdoors.

Free-Range

The term free-range is defined by USDA and is allowed on a label if producers demonstrate that poultry has access to the outdoors, although it does not specify

the length of time the animal must be outside in order to qualify. There is no definition for other free-range animals.

No Antibiotics Added

The term "no-antibiotics added" is defined by the USDA and can be used on labels for meat or poultry if sufficient documentation is provided; however verification is not required. This means that the farmer did not administer antibiotics to promote growth.

No Hormones Added

The USDA does not allow hormones to be used in poultry or pork. Since this is already the case, the term may only be added to the label if it is followed by a statement that says, "federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones." However, hormones are allowed to be used on cows, so this label is especially meaningful on beef.

Grass Fed

This label means that the meat must come from animals that have never been given grain and have access to pasture during the grazing season, although the farms are not required to be inspected by the agency. The grass fed label does not prohibit animals from being raised with antibiotics or hormones.

For more information or support on supermarket labels, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks®** by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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Fruit & Vegetables

PLU Codes

You may have noticed that fruits and vegetables all have what's called PLU codes on them. These codes are very helpful in that they help you decipher how the produce is grown. Codes that begin with a 3 or 4 indicate that the produce was grown conventionally. Codes that begin with a 9 indicate that the produce has been grown organically. Finally codes that begin with an 8 indicate the produce has been genetically modified (GMO).

No-Spray/Pesticide Free

This term implies that no pesticides, herbicides, or chemicals have been applied, but a third party does not verify this claim.

General Terms

Organic

Organic production limits and/or prohibits the use of synthetic chemicals (including pesticides) hormones, and antibiotics. This term is closely regulated and verified. All products sold as organic must meet the USDA National Organic Program Production and Handling Standards. Certification is mandatory for farmers and is verified by an accredited certifying agency.

Natural

This term refers to a product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and is only minimally processed. However, this does not regulate how the animal was raised or how the produce was grown, and there is no third-party verification.

Free

This generally refers to fat free, sugar free, and sodium free. To be labeled free, a product can still have trace amounts of fat, sugar, or sodium, but will be largely free of these ingredients. However, read labels carefully as these foods are not always a great choice. For example, a food can be sugar free, but still contain artificial sweeteners and a food that is fat free may be really high in sodium.

Reduced/Less

This term really just means that the amount of fat, calories, sodium, sugar, etc. is less than the original reference food, but the amount can still be high. To use this label, the food should have at least 25% less of the identified substance than the original.

Light

This term also means that the food should contain less of the identified substance than the original. To be light, the fat content should be reduced by at least half and/or the calories should be reduced by one third. To be considered lightly salted, a food should have 50% less sodium than the reference food.

As you can see it's important not to be blinded by flashy labels. Some labels such as organic are certified, while others can make claims without being verified, making them less meaningful.

When purchasing produce, meat, and eggs decide which labels (if any) are important to you. Finally, remember to always check the ingredient list and nutrition facts on packaged foods to make the best choices for you and your family.

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