FOOD LABELS

A very important part of a weight loss program, or just being a savvy consumer, is reading and understanding labels. I know… that sounds pretty boring, but labels can be very misleading.

The first thing you want to take into account is that everything on the front of the package is there to sell the product. There are FDA (Food and Drug Administration) standards that need to be met, but it's easy for companies to mislead while keeping to the standardized labeling laws.

One thing you want to pay attention to is serving size. The product maker can use any serving size they want, but it's not necessarily what the RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) says is a serving. For example, one RDA serving of starch is approximately 70 calories, or 15 grams, or ½ cup. A cereal box can tell you that a serving is 1 ½ cups, and has 210 calories. Obviously, that serving of 210 calories is 3 starch servings, which is 140 calories above what a serving is supposed to supply. Many people make that mistake, then wonder why they aren't losing.

Another aspect of serving size is to look at "servings per container". A good example of this is microwave popcorn. Many brands label their products to say there are 6 servings in a bag, and you know you can and do eat the whole bag! That means you have to multiply the calorie and nutrient counts listed by 6!! At first glance it looks like the bag has only 60 calories, when in reality it is 360.

Be careful of wording on labels also. An example of this one is cooking oil. They can (and have) strategically write "NO SATURATED FAT" on the label. Yes, saturated fat is the least healthy, but all fat, whether unsaturated or saturated, is still 9 calories per gram – equally as "fattening". People don't see the word saturated in there, and assume the product is non fat, when in reality it is 100% fat.

These are just a few examples that give you an idea how important it is to read and understand labels. You owe it to yourself to know exactly what you're putting into your body, whether weight loss is a goal or not.