

There are a lot of food products out there on the market right now that are getting a lot of hype about being free of this or that, but what do those buzzwords actually mean? Are they really more beneficial for us? Let's take a closer look at a few trendy products.

Gluten Free

What it means: The Food and Drug Administration guidelines state that a food must contain less than 20 parts per million gluten in order to use "gluten-free" on its label.

Does it matter: The target population for these foods is people who have an intolerance to gluten, a protein found in grains, as well as those suffering from celiac disease. Gluten free foods are trendy right now, with some people believing they aid in weight loss and other health problems, but there is no sound evidence that avoiding gluten will help with these issues. Eliminating gluten from the diet may mean you are missing out on important carbohydrates and fiber. Also, gluten-free products are more costly. If your doctor hasn't diagnosed you with a gluten-intolerance or celiac disease, it's safe to say gluten free foods do not need to be a part of your diet.

Fat-Free

What it means: A product must contain less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving to bear this label.

Does it matter: Often times, when fat is taken out of products, sugar or salt are added to increase shelf life, flavor or texture. If you do buy fat-free or low-fat products be sure to watch the sugar and salt content. Opt for fat-free or low-fat products such as milk, cottage cheese, chips, pudding, ice cream and microwave popcorn.

Natural

What it means: This is a very unregulated term and can mean just about anything. According to the USDA definition, it does not contain artificial ingredients or preservatives and the ingredients are only minimally processed. However, they may contain antibiotics, growth hormones and other similar chemicals.

Does it matter: The term "natural" can be very misleading and a company can use natural to mean just about anything. Some natural food products may have more saturated fat and sugar than the regular version, so they are not always the most healthy choice.

Whole Grain

What it means: This designation means that food contains the entire grain seed and has not been refined.

Does it matter: It is recommended that at least half of your grain intake be from whole grains such as oatmeal, brown rice or whole-wheat products. Look for the Whole Grain Council stamp on products, if it says "8g" that means the food contains at least a half-serving of whole grains. If whole oat or whole wheat are one of the first listings on the ingredient list, that's a good sign.

Try out this recipe for whole grain cookies. There is no butter or oil needed, but with the applesauce and zucchini they still maintain their moistness and a lot of flavor!

Zucchini Applesauce Oatmeal Cookies



Yields: 2 dozen cookies

Ingredients:

- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves
- 1/8 tsp. ground nutmeg
- ¼ cup applesauce
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 cup shredded zucchini
- 2 cups old fashioned oats
- ½ cup raisins (optional)
- ¾ cup semisweet chocolate chips

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg. Set aside.
3. In a large mixing bowl, combine applesauce and brown sugar, mix until smooth. Add egg and vanilla extract. Next, add the shredded zucchini. Mix until combined.
4. Slowly add flour mixture until just combined. Stir in oats, raisins, and chocolate chips.
5. Drop cookie dough by heaping tablespoonfuls, 2 inches apart, onto prepared baking sheet. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until cookies are slightly golden around the edges and set. Remove cookies from pan; cool completely on wire racks.