

Healthy Options Label

What is the Healthy Options Label?

The main purpose of the “Healthy Option” label is to guide consumers in selecting the healthier option when faced with multiple choices of a particular type of food item. Please note that the “Healthy Option” label is simply a guide for the general public. Everyone’s nutritional needs are unique; therefore, the consumer needs to be a full participant in the process of making healthy choices. Some consumers have specific dietary restrictions (i.e. gluten-free, sugar-free) that they need to pay close attention to when shopping that may not be reflected in the “Healthy Options” label. Also keep in mind that most products that bear the “Healthy Options” label are processed foods which are never as healthy as their whole food counterparts such as fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, nuts and seeds. In addition, the “Healthy Options” label not only covers food, but personal care and household products. These items are selected with your health and the health of the environment in mind. The product recommendations are based on the research of Kimberly Rush Lynch, the Co-op's Education and Member Outreach Coordinator. Kim is a Certified Nutritional Consultant and Health Coach and the owner of the local business, Cultivating Health.

Products bearing the “Healthy Options” label subscribe to one or more of the following criteria.

- Whole Food Ingredients
- Few Ingredients
- No Harmful Ingredients
- No Artificial Sweeteners
- Sustainable Ingredients
- Eco-friendly Household and Personal Care Products

For more information, please check out the selection of handouts in our *Consumers Corner*. If you have a question or concern about the “Healthy Option” label or a product bearing the label, please contact Kim at membership@greenbelt.coop or drop her a note in the suggestion box. She looks forward to hearing how we might better serve the members and customers of the Greenbelt Co-op Supermarket and Pharmacy.

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Criteria

Whole Food Ingredients. The healthiest foods are whole foods. Nature has provided us with foods that contain the ratio of nutrients that our bodies understand. In addition, there are a variety of phytonutrients (some are well-known while others remain to be discovered) found in whole foods that can't be replicated in a supplement or packaged foods labeled "enriched." "Enriched" means that the nutrients have been stripped away and then put back in by the processor. These supplemental nutrients are never of the same quality as the whole food. Some packaged foods contain whole food ingredients. For example, many products are now made with whole grains or unrefined whole grain flours which are healthier because they contain more of the nutrients of whole foods and our bodies better understand how to use them.

Few Ingredients. When deciding on a packaged food item, always look for those with the least number of ingredients, ideally ten or fewer. You should recognize the ingredients as food and be able to pronounce them. Simpler foods are easier on the body's digestive system.

No Harmful Ingredients. There are many harmful ingredients in our packaged foods including trace amounts of pesticides and herbicides, trans-fats, harmful oils (i.e. soybean and other unstable vegetable seed oils), MSG, preservatives and artificial colors and flavoring agents. Look for packaged foods that contain organic ingredients and no harmful ingredients.

No Artificial Sweeteners. Sugar and other sweeteners are found in many packaged food items. Only a relatively small proportion of products use natural sweeteners which contain the enzymes, fiber and nutrients necessary to assist your body with the digestion process. Examples of natural sweeteners include raw honey, brown rice syrup, maple syrup, blackstrap molasses, Rapadura (mechanically milled cane sugar) and stevia. Agave is low on the glycemic index while stevia, an herb used for centuries, has no affect on blood sugar levels.

Sustainable Ingredients. The "Healthy Option" label highlights animal products that strive to promote the welfare of the animal and the environment. These animal foods subscribe to one or more of the following criteria: antibiotic-free, hormone-free, grass-fed, locally-raised and processed, nitrate-free, pasture-raised and/or wild-caught. There are also local fruits and vegetables highlighted in the produce department. Produce at the Co-op labeled "local" is grown within a 130 mile radius of Greenbelt. In addition to having a smaller carbon footprint, local foods often contain more nutrients than those shipped from far away because a) they can be picked when ripe or close to ripe and b) less time has passed between the time of harvest and the time of consumption, thus there is less time for nutrient degradation to take place.

Eco-friendly Household and Personal Care Products. The label, "Healthy Option," goes beyond healthy food. Although, we may not eat them, some products are selected because they are healthy for the environment. Many household items and personal care products contain chemicals that are harmful to our bodies and the planet. More manufacturers are making cruelty-free products with natural ingredients, safer chemicals and recyclable and/or biodegradable materials and packaging.