

# Nutrition Vocabulary

Nutrition news is all around us. A lot of the news worthy topics are peppered with hard to define words. While some terms maybe familiar to you, the key is to become acquainted with a variety of terms so that you can make informed decisions about your food choices.



Let's look at a few terms:

1. **Free Radicals**-our bodies naturally produce these chemicals that attack and damage healthy cells. The most common free radical in humans is an oxygen molecule that has become electrically charged. Oxidation damages cell structure and can potentially lead to illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Individuals can also be exposed to free radicals found in our environment such as smoke, pollution and cigarette tar. In addition, more free radicals are produced under stress. Exercise such as meditation and yoga are stress relievers and can help counteract free radical effects.
2. **Antioxidants**-chemicals found naturally in plants such as vitamins C, E and beta-carotene. They help to neutralize free radicals and keep cells healthy. To understand the difference between free radicals and antioxidants, consider the way sliced apples turn brown when exposed to air. The "browning" effect of the apple slices is due to free radical damage or oxidation. However, you can prevent the browning from occurring by using a lemon juice or fruit freshener, which contains vitamin C an antioxidant. To get plenty of antioxidants in your diet consume brightly colored fruits and vegetables, herbs and nuts.
3. **Trans Fatty Acids**- these fats act like saturated fat in the body elevating blood cholesterol levels and increasing our risk for heart disease. These fats have also been found to lower our good cholesterol or HDL levels. Trans fats result from changing the chemical structure of a liquid fat and making it more solid at room temperature. By January 2006 all food labels will have to reveal the amount of trans fat on the label. Ingredients such as hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils are indication of the presence of trans fatty acids. To decrease your intake of trans fats, use liquid oils rather than solid fats and if you choose to eat processed foods look at the label carefully.
4. **Isoflavones**-natural chemicals believed to have disease- fighting effects and are found mainly in soy foods. Despite conflicting data, FDA maintains that eating foods such as soymilk, tofu, soy nuts and tempeh may reduce the risk for heart disease as well as certain cancers.
5. **Omega-3 Fatty Acids**-these building blocks of fat are found in certain kinds of fish and plant foods. Omega-3's may lower the risk of heart disease; reduce artery inflammation and boost immunity. ADA recommends eating 2-3 fish meals per week. Other sources of Omega 3's include: walnuts, flaxseed and flax oil.
6. **Phytochemicals**-these substances are part of all plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains. Phytochemical intake has been linked to prevention of cancer and heart disease. Much attention has focused on a phytochemical called lycopene, which is present in the red pigment of tomatoes, pink grapefruit and watermelon.

Hopefully reviewing these terms has increased your understanding of some commonly used words in nutrition reports.