

# Lost in Translation

We shed light on food label claims

**YOU’VE ALWAYS HEARD** you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. But what about cereal boxes, canned vegetables or containers of ice cream? Phrases like *whole grain*, *organic* and *light* can be deceptive, says registered dietitian nutritionist Keri Gans, the author of *The Small Change Diet* and the weight-loss coach for Shape.com. Sometimes those terms aren’t regulated, while the ones that are still might not mean what you’d expect. It’s time to expand your label lexicon.

### ORGANIC OPTIONS

Foods that are certified as “organic” by the U.S. Department of Agriculture may still contain nonorganically produced ingredients. “It can be misleading,” Gans says. “Not all organic food is 100 percent organic.”

Under USDA standards:

- ▶ Only foods labeled **100 PERCENT ORGANIC** contain nothing but organically produced ingredients (not including added water and salt).
- ▶ Foods labeled **ORGANIC** can still carry the USDA seal but can contain up to 5 percent nonorganically produced ingredients.
- ▶ Foods labeled **MADE WITH ORGANIC INGREDIENTS** must have at least 70 percent organic content, and the nutritional information panel must specify which ingredients are organic.
- ▶ **NATURAL** is supposed to mean that a food includes no synthetic substances or added colors or flavors, “but there’s no formal FDA regulation,” Gans says. “The term has a connotation that ‘if it’s natural, it’s good for me,’ but that’s not always true.”
- ▶ **FRESH** can’t appear on foods that contain preservatives or have been frozen or cooked.

### GRAINS OF TRUTH

Whole grain equals healthy, right? Not so fast. “Turn the package over and read the



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ingredients,” Gans says. “You’re looking for ‘100 percent whole grain’ or ‘100 percent whole wheat.’ And the earlier in the ingredient list, the better. If something is promoted as ‘whole grain,’ examine the fiber nutritional information. It shouldn’t be as low as 1 gram.”

- ▶ Foods labeled **HIGH FIBER** must contain 5 grams or more fiber per serving.
- ▶ This year the U.S. Food and Drug Administration specified that foods labeled **GLUTEN-FREE** must contain less than 20 parts per million gluten.
- ▶ **ENRICHED** or **FORTIFIED** foods have been nutritionally altered so that one serving provides at least 10 percent more of daily value than the unchanged food would have.

### SEE THE LIGHT

“It’s important to remember that ‘light’ isn’t always synonymous with low calorie or low fat,” Gans says. “A light version of cheesecake is still dessert.”

- ▶ If the original version of a food derives more than half its calories from fat, its **LIGHT** version must have reduced the fat content by at least 50 percent.
  - ▶ If the original version of a food derives less than half its calories from fat, its **LIGHT** version must have reduced either its calories by one-third or its fat by one-half.
- By Sam Mittelsteadt

### Other Highs and Lows

Here are some other terms you’ll see floating around the grocery store.

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| ▶ <b>LOW CALORIE:</b> Contains less than 40 calories per serving.                    | provides 10 percent or more daily value.  |
| ▶ <b>CALORIE-FREE:</b> Contains less than 5 calories per serving.                    | ▶ <b>REDUCED:</b> Contains 25 percent less of a specified nutrient, or fewer calories, than the reference food.                       |
| ▶ <b>LOW FAT:</b> Contains 3 grams or less fat per serving.                          | ▶ <b>LOW SODIUM:</b> Less than 140 milligrams per serving.  |
| ▶ <b>FAT-FREE:</b> Contains less than ½ gram fat per serving.                        | ▶ <b>LOW CHOLESTEROL or CHOLESTEROL-FREE:</b> Less than 20 milligrams cholesterol, and 2 grams or less of saturated fat, per serving. |
| ▶ <b>HIGH IN:</b> Provides 20 percent or more daily value of the specified nutrient. |   |
| ▶ <b>GOOD SOURCE OF:</b> Similar to “high in” but                                    |   |



Source: [eatright.org](http://eatright.org)