



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## Smart Choices help shoppers find items within their caloric needs

*By Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins,  
DeCA dietitian*

**FORT LEE, Va.** – If you are looking for nutrition guidance on the front of the foods you buy in the commissary, your search just got easier. The Smart Choices Program was developed based on the value of a single, credible and uniform front-of-package nutrition labeling system that U.S. food manufacturers and retailers can voluntarily adopt.

This system is designed to help shoppers identify smarter food and beverage choices within product categories that fit within their daily calorie needs. The new symbol will be allowed only on those products that meet strict science-based nutrition criteria derived from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, reports from the Institute of Medicine and other sources of consensus dietary guidance.

Specific qualifying criteria were developed for 19 product categories, such as beverages, cereals, meats, dairy and snacks, based on the presence of nutrients to limit (for example, fats and added sugars), nutrients to encourage (for example, calcium and potassium), and food groups to encourage (for example, fruits and vegetables and whole grains).

By developing nutrition criteria for these 19 product categories based on consensus dietary guidance, the Smart Choices Program is designed to help guide consumer choices within each product category. To help you better understand the science behind the check mark here is more information from [www.smartchoicesprogram.com](http://www.smartchoicesprogram.com).

- **Nutrients to Limit:** These are nutrients that Americans need to eat less of in their diet for better health.

Nutrients to Limit – General Benchmarks	
Total fat	≤ 35 % of calories
Saturated fat	< 10 % of calories
Trans fat	0 g (labeled)
Cholesterol	≤ 60 mg per serving
Added sugars	≤ 25 % of total calories
Sodium	≤ 480 mg per serving

- **Nutrients to Encourage:** These are the “nutrients of concern,” that is, nutrients lacking in the diet, as identified by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Nutrients to Encourage	Calcium, potassium, fiber, magnesium, vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E	A food must offer ≥10% Daily Value (a “good source”) of at least one of these nutrients
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- **Food Groups to Encourage:** These are groups of foods, rather than individual nutrients, that are recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Food Groups to	Fruits, vegetables, whole	A food must provide at
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Encourage	grains, fat-free/low-fat milk products	least ½ of a serving of one of these food groups
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**Calorie information**

Public policy consistently recommends that people eat within an appropriate daily calorie intake to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Therefore, all products displaying the Smart Choices Program symbol will be required to display the calorie information that clearly states calories per serving and number of servings per container. The intent of the calorie information is to help people stay within their daily calorie needs and easily compare the calorie content of foods within categories.

**Product categories**

The Smart Choices Program includes 19 product categories that must meet the general qualifying criteria of nutrients to limit and nutrients or food groups to encourage. Each category was then evaluated to fine-tune the criteria so that it was in line with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and other sources of nutrition science and authoritative guidance.

Product category	Qualifying criteria
Fruits and vegetables (with no additives)	Automatically qualify
Fruits and vegetables (with additives), 100% juice	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage
Breads, grains, pasta	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage

Product category	Qualifying criteria
Cereals	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage
Meat, fish, poultry	Nutrients to limit only
Meat alternatives	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage
Seeds, nuts, nut butters	Nutrients to limit only
Cheeses and cheese substitutes	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage
Milk, dairy products, and dairy substitutes (including soy beverages)	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage
Fats, oils, spreads (including butter)	Nutrients to limit only
Soups, meal sauces, and mixed side dishes	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage

Product category	Qualifying criteria
Meals	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient to encourage as well as 1.5 servings from food group to encourage
Sauces, dressing and condiments	Nutrients to limit and $\geq 1$ nutrient or food group to encourage
Snack foods and sweets	Nutrients to limit and at least one nutrient or food group to encourage
Desserts	Nutrients to limit and $\geq 1$ nutrient or food group to encourage
Beverages	Nutrients to limit applies to all beverages, then: if $\leq 20$ calories/serving: nutrients to limit only if $\leq 40$ calories/serving: at least one nutrient or food group to encourage if $\leq 60$ calories/serving: at least one nutrient and food group to encourage (4 oz juice = 1 food group)
Water (plain and carbonated)	Automatically qualify
Chewing gum	Nutrients to limit and “sugar-free”

For more information about making healthy choices, visit Ask the Dietitian on <http://www.commissaries.com> and post your questions on the DeCA Dietitian Forum. Be sure to look for other useful information in the Dietitian’s Voice archive. Sign up with the DeCA Dietitian on [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and get messages sent to your cell phone today. For delicious

recipes, check out Kay's Kitchen. And to enjoy all your commissary has to offer, sign up for the *Commissary Connection*.

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**About DeCA:** *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*