

Step-by-Step Guide to Ranking Foods Using the HER Guidelines

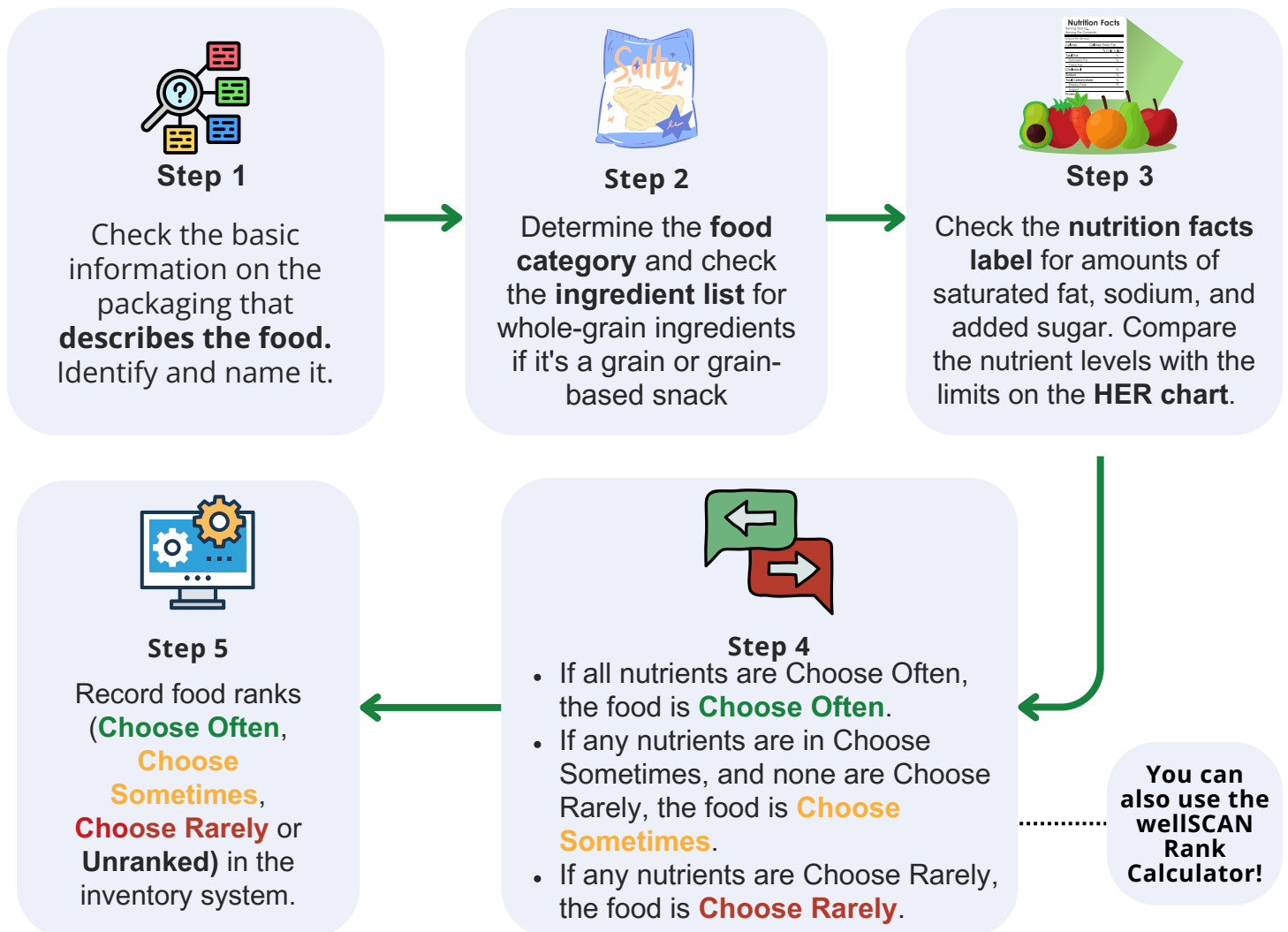
Background

This training covers the following topics:

- Steps to rank foods using the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System
- Tips for naming and identifying foods
- How to check labels and identify key components of foods
- How to identify whole grains
- Understanding added sugars
- How to identify if a product has diet sweeteners



Step-by-Step Guide



Naming Items to Create the Item Description

For packaged products, look at the front of the package to find information about the name, brand, and type of food

1

Look for phrases like: "sugar-free", "low-fat", "fat-free", "no added salt", "low-sodium", "diet", or "no added sugar"

2

Note the packaging type: e.g., bag, can, bottle

3

Name the food like the way you see in the grocery store by including specific details. For example: black beans, low sodium, canned

4

For USDA Foods, add the USDA identification number (i.e., WBSM ID) to the name. For example: Rice, long grain, 111075

5





Taking a photo of the front and back of a product and storing it in a folder or inventory system is a great strategy for ranking, and it makes it easier to verify ranks later!



When naming food in the inventory system, give enough detail to distinguish between different products.

Example of Creating the Item Description

Product	Get as much information as possible about the product	Look for phrases on the packaging such as "Sugar-Free", "Low-fat", "Fat-free", "No Salt", "Low-sodium", "Diet", or "No added sugar"	Is the product in a can? Jar? Bottle?	Is this product a USDA food?	Create the item description the product
 Spaghetti sauce	Spaghetti sauce with basil leaves from Wonder Tomato	Low sodium	Jar (14oz)	No	Spaghetti sauce, with basil, low sodium, Wonder Tomato, jar (14oz)
 Milk	Milk, low-fat, unflavored	Low-fat, shelf-stable UHT	Carton (32oz)	Yes; add USDA ID#	1% low-fat milk, unflavored, shelf-stable UHT, carton (32oz) (100050)



Over time, if the same item has different formulations and different ranks, create one detailed item description to identify each of versions of the product and its rank.

How to Check Labels

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size (500g)	
Amount per serving	
Calories	250
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 2g	7%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 100mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 30g	10%
Dietary Fiber 2g	11%
Total Sugars 1g	25%
Incl. Added Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A 2mcg	8%
Vitamin C 5mcg	15%
Calcium 200mg	20%
Iron 10mg	40%

Nutrition Facts labels provides information about the amount of nutrients in **one serving** of the product. It is usually located in the back of the product.



Use the "as packaged" information instead of the "as prepared"

Check the amount of saturated fat

Saturated fat is listed in grams (g) under the "Total Fat" section

Check the amount of sodium

Sodium is listed in milligrams (mg)

Check the amount of added sugar

Added sugars are listed in grams (g) under the "Total Carbohydrates" section

Some labels only list Total Sugar and not Added Sugar



In this case and for Fruits and Vegetables or Dairy products, use "Total Sugars" to rank the item. There is a higher total sugar threshold because of the naturally occurring sugars. More information can be found on the next page.

Identifying Whole Grains

DEFINING WHOLE GRAINS

- GRAINS
- GRAIN-BASED SNACKS



As a first step, you should look for the Whole Grain Stamp on the package

In the second step, examine the first item on the ingredients list

The words "enriched", "refined", "bleached", "polished" are usually in products that ARE NOT a whole grain

If the word "whole" is present, it should be classified as a whole grain. A list with other common words is described here!

LOOK FOR THESE WORDS TO IDENTIFY IF THE PRODUCT IS WHOLE GRAIN

✓	Amaranth	✓	Oats
✓	Barley	✓	Popcorn
✓	Brown Rice	✓	Quinoa
✓	Buckwheat	✓	Sorghum
✓	Bulgur	✓	Spelt
✓	Dark Rye	✓	Unrefined Wheat
✓	Farro	✓	Wheat Berries
✓	Millet	✓	Wild Rice

Understanding Added Sugars

WHAT ARE ADDED SUGARS?

ADDED SUGARS

Sugars not naturally present in food and added through industrial processing

Some foods like regular soda, concentrated fruit juice, energy drinks, cereals, granola bars and desserts have added sugars

TOTAL SUGARS

Represents the natural and added sugars present in foods and beverages

Divided into added sugars and natural sugars

NATURAL SUGARS

Sugars naturally present in foods, such as fruits, dairy, and vegetables

Dried fruits have their natural sugars concentrated



Some foods like canned fruit and yogurt can have both natural sugar and added sugars

LOOK FOR SOME EXAMPLES OF THESE WORDS TO IDENTIFY ADDED SUGARS*

- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| ✓ Cane sugar | ✓ Dextrose |
| ✓ Corn sugar | ✓ Molasses |
| ✓ Corn sweetener | ✓ Sucrose |
| ✓ Corn syrup | ✓ Maltose |
| ✓ Maple syrup | |

*Not all names of added sugars are included in this list



The amount of added sugars can be found on the Nutrition Label. If missing, check the rank using Total Sugars

Identifying Diet Sweeteners

- DAIRY
- BEVERAGES

Some Dairy and Beverages products may contain diet sweeteners. If so, they should not be ranked **Choose Often** because of potential health risks



Look for products that have sugar-content labels, e.g., "diet", "no sugar", "sugar free"

Check for diet sweeteners in the ingredient list

If identified, rank can be **Choose Sometimes** or **Choose Rarely** based on the amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar

LOOK FOR THESE WORDS TO IDENTIFY DIET SWEETENERS

- ✓ Acesulfame potassium (Ace-K) (e.g., Sunett, Sweet One)
- ✓ Advantame
- ✓ Aspartame (e.g., Equal, NutraSweet)
- ✓ Monk fruit extract (e.g., Luo Han Guo)
- ✓ Neotame (e.g., Newtame)
- ✓ Saccharin (e.g., Sweet'N Low)
- ✓ Steviol glycosides (e.g., Stevia, Truvia)
- ✓ Sucralose (e.g., Splenda)
- ✓ Sugar alcohols, xylitol, sorbitol, mannitol, hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH), erythritol

Nutrition Guidelines - Ranking Charitable Food

Food Category	Example Products	Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
		Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*
Fruits and Vegetables	Fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables, frozen broccoli with cheese sauce, apple sauce, tomato sauce, 100% juice, 100% fruit popsicle	≤2 g	≤230 mg	0 g	All 100% juice and plain dried fruit			≥2.5 g**	≥480 mg	≥12 g
					≥2.5 g**	231-479 mg	1-11 g			
Grains	Bread, rice, pasta, grains with seasoning mixes	First ingredient must be whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5 g**	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥2.5 g**	≥480 mg	≥12 g
		≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g						
Protein	Animal (beef, pork, poultry, sausage, deli meats, hot dogs, eggs) and plant proteins (nuts, seeds, veggie burgers, soy, beans, peanut butter)	≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g	2.5-4.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
Dairy	Milk, cheese, yogurt	≤3 g	≤230 mg	0 g	3.5-6 g	231-479 mg	1-11 g	≥6.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
Non-Dairy Alternatives	All plant-based milks, yogurts and cheeses	≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g	≥2.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	7-11 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
Beverages	Water, soda, coffee, tea, sports drinks, non-100% juice products	0 g	0 mg	0 g	0 g	1-140 mg	1-11 g	≥1 g	≥141 mg	≥12 g
Mixed Dishes	Frozen meals,soups, stews, macaroni and cheese	≤3 g	≤480 mg	≤6 g	3.5-6 g	481-599 mg	7-11 g	≥6.5 g	≥600 mg	≥12 g
Processed and Packaged Snacks	Chips (including potato, corn, and other vegetable chips), crackers, granola and other bars, popcorn	None			If a grain is the first ingredient, it must be a whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5 g	≥141 mg	≥7 g
					0-2 g	0-140 mg	0-6 g			
Desserts	Ice cream, frozen yogurt, chocolate, cookies, cakes, pastries, snack cakes, baked goods, cake mixes	None			None			All desserts		
Condiments and Cooking Staples	Spices, oil, butter, plant-based spreads, flour, dressing, jarred sauces (except tomato sauce), seasoning, salt, sugar	Unranked								
Miscellaneous Products	Nutritional supplements, baby food	Unranked								

Source: Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020. Available at <https://healthyeatingresearch.org>.

*Use the added sugars value when available on the Nutrition Facts Label. If it is not available, use the value of the total sugar. The thresholds are the same for all categories except Fruits and Vegetables and Dairy.

Notes: Overall food product rankings are determined by the lowest tier of any nutrient. For example, a product that is ranked Choose Often for saturated fat, Choose Sometimes for sodium, and Choose Rarely for added sugars would receive a final ranking of Choose Rarely.