

Food labels get makeover to help consumers choose

Written by Bob Dohr Daily Herald Media
Mar. 7, 2014

Some shoppers may scrupulously study them, others may only glance at them, still others may not even know they're there.

No matter, the Nutrition Facts label — that box that tells consumers how much sodium, protein, carbs, calories and other nutrients that foods contain — is getting a makeover and it's one that local health advocates appreciate.

The label was introduced in 1993 to provide consumers with important information on food packages. But much has changed since then — people are eating larger servings, rates of obesity, heart disease and stroke remain high, and more is known about the relationship between nutrients and the risk of chronic diseases today than was known 20 years ago.

So the Food and Drug Administration is proposing a re-do of the rectangular black-and-white label.

The servings-per container-information will be bolder and listed above the serving size; the calories listing will be bolder and more prominent; calories from fat will be eliminated; and a new "added sugars" category will be added if the changes being proposed are adopted.

Aspirus registered dietitian Jennifer Mikulich thinks the emphasis on calories is a positive. She's also on board with differentiating between sugars and added sugars. "That's very confusing to some people," Mikulich said. "Like milk. There's sugar in milk but that's a natural sugar."

Wausau's **Downtown Grocery co-manager Megan Curtes Korpela** agrees that a lot of products have naturally occurring sugars and it makes sense to point that out.

"I think it's helpful to differentiate," Curtes Korpela said. "Sugars can come from a lot of different places and they can affect the body in different ways."

Curtes Korpela also likes the idea of having the servings per container information be more prominent — and more accurate.

"Someone doesn't have to take a bottle of soda and divide the calories by two or the sugars by two," Curtes Korpela said of the new labels. "It may seem easy enough to do, but a lot of people are in a rush."

The proposed changes aren't as comprehensive as some would like. They don't include a provision for unsaturated fats, for example, and Marshfield Clinic registered dietitian Johnilee Slark thinks that's a shortcoming.

"The saturateds are there, but having more of those unsaturated fats are extremely important when you're looking at hyperlipidemia and insulin resistance," Slark said.

The FDA is also proposing updating serving size requirements to reflect what people actually eat, not what they "should" be eating.

Mikulich said that's a slippery slope.

"That's a little scary to me," Mikulich said. "If they go to that, a lot of people will be eating more than what they should be."

But Mikulich agrees some of the current serving sizes are not realistic. Some 12-ounce cans of soda, for example, say they contain two servings, and even vending-machine bags of snacks claim to contain multiple servings now.

"Half a pickle, that's ridiculous to me," she said. "But I don't want to see them go the other way and have too large of a serving size."

The FDA has divided the proposed changes into two rules and is taking comment on them through June 2 at www.regulations.gov. If approved, the food industry would be given two years to comply with the rules.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per 2/3 cup	
Calories	230
% DV*	
12%	Total Fat 8g
5%	Saturated Fat 1g
	Trans Fat 0g
0%	Cholesterol 0mg
7%	Sodium 160mg
12%	Total Carbs 37g
14%	Dietary Fiber 4g
	Sugars 1g
	Added Sugars 0g
	Protein 3g
10%	Vitamin D 2mcg
20%	Calcium 260mg
45%	Iron 8mg
5%	Potassium 235mg

* Footnote on Daily Values (DV) and calories reference to be inserted here.

Proposed changes to the Nutrition Facts food label include a more prominent calories listing and a separate "added sugars" listing. Image courtesy of the Food and Drug Administration

Proposed food label changes:

- A greater emphasis — with larger and bolder type — on calories.
- For the first time, "Added Sugars" would be included. On average, Americans eat 16 percent of their daily calories from sugars added during food production.
- Calories from fat would no longer be listed. Total, saturated and trans fat would still be required.
- The number of servings per package would also be more prominent. And "Amount Per Serving" would have the actual serving size listed, such as "Amount per cup."
- Updated serving size requirements would reflect the reality of what people actually eat, according to recent food consumption data. By law, serving sizes must be based on what people actually eat, not on what they "should" be eating.
- Daily Values for various nutrients would be updated. Daily Values are used to calculate the Percent Daily Value (%DV) on the label, which helps consumers understand the nutrition information in the context of a total diet. In addition, the %DV would be shifted to the left of the label. FDA wants to help consumers visually and quickly put nutrient information in context.
- Potassium and Vitamin D content would be required. Vitamin D is important for healthy bones, especially among women and the elderly. And potassium helps to lower blood pressure and prevent hypertension.

Source: Food and Drug Administration

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