

Nutritional Labeling of Food Products: Imperative Aspect in Packaging

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Abstract

Food labeling has become a primary means of communication between the producer, the seller and the consumer of food. Diet-related health problems have increased dramatically over the last few years. Consequently, nutritional labeling has emerged as an important aspect of consumer's food purchase decisions. Nutritional content in food products is considered to be a credence attribute. However, if trustworthy nutritional labels are available, nutritional labels could function as a search characteristic.

Introduction

Nutrition label is considered as an ideal vehicle for conveying dietary guidance and information about the nutritional attributes of food. Nutrition labeling law starts working from December, 2007 for all prepackaged foods. Nutrition labeling becomes mandatory from March, 2009. Thus, with the purpose of bringing India in line with the developed world, all processed food made or sold in India will have to carry nutritional label from March 2009 (Statement of Hon. Health minister, Anbumani Ramados). A new food label tells a lot about food. They don't suggest what foods to eat - that's your decision.

But labels can help you make your "personal best" food choices that benefit you now and in future, too. The nutrition facts food label gives you information about which nutrients are in the food. Your body needs the right combination of nutrients, to work properly and grow. This label is printed somewhere on the outside of packaged food and you usually don't have to look hard to find it. Agencies that have formulated food labeling norms are; Nutritional Labeling and Education Act, USA (NLEA), Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), European Union (EU) and Prevention of Food Adulteration Act of India (PFA)

Labeling Regulation in India: Under PFA Act 1954, rule 32, Labeling of prepackaged food has been made mandatory, but the nutrition labeling is still in its infancy.

As per rule, the label should have followed information:

- 1) Identifying statement (common name of product)
- 2) Net weight or net contents
- 3) Artificial coloring, flavoring and preservatives
- 4) Name and address of manufacturer
- 5) List of ingredients in order of weight in the package
- 6) Percent of daily value based on 2000 calories a day.
- 7) Sign or symbol of indicating vegetarian or non-vegetarian

Table 1: Nutrients to be display on Label (Food Safety and Analytical Quality Control Laboratory, CFTRI, Mysore)

Mandatory Nutrients	Voluntary Nutrients
Calories (Calorie or Kilocalorie)	Calories from fat (Calorie or Kilocalorie)
Total fat (Gram or gm)	Polyunsaturated Fat (Gram or gm)
Cholesterol (Milligram or mg)	Monounsaturated Fat (Gram or gm)
Total Carbohydrate (Gram or gm)	Potassium (Gram or gm)
Dietary Fiber (Gram or gm)	Soluble Fiber (Gram or gm)
Sugars (Gram or gm)	Insoluble Fiber (Gram or gm)
Protein (Gram or gm)	Other Carbohydrate (Gram or gm)
Vitamin A (% of DV)	Potassium (Milligram or mg)
Vitamin C (% of DV)	Caffeine (Milligram or mg)
Calcium (% of DV)	Other vitamins (With estd RDI)
Iron (% of DV)	Other minerals (With estd RDI)

Purpose of Nutritional Labeling of Food Product

Nutrient declaration: Information supplied should be for the purpose of providing consumers with a suitable profile of nutrients contained in the food and considered to be of nutritional importance. The information should not lead consumers to believe that there is exact quantitative knowledge of what individuals should eat in order to maintain health, but rather to convey an understanding of the quantity of nutrients contained in the product (Andreas et al., 2006).

Purchasing decisions: Derby et al. (2001) reported that, in the diet and health survey of Americans, one-third of consumers said that they had changed their decision to buy a product because of the information on the nutrition label.

Food labels don't suggest what foods to eat – that's your decision. But labels can help you make your "personal best" food choices that benefit you now and in future, too.

The objective of nutritional labeling is to make significant impact on consumer's health through declarations of certain nutrients such as polyunsaturated fatty acids, omega-3, fiber, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium etc. These nutrient declarations follow the stated health policy objectives of the country and labeling provides positive or avoidance choices (Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling, 1985).

Key Parts of The Food Label

Principal Display Panel (PDP):

- 1) Portion of label most likely to be seen by consumer during purchase is termed as PDP.
- 2) PDP must contain; net quantity of content (amount of food in package).

Information Panel

- 1) Portion of label immediate right to the principal display panel is the information panel.
- 2) Information panel must contain; name and address of manufacturer, ingredient list with proportion and nutritional information per 100 gm.

Reference: Camille (2003).

Conclusion

Nutritional labeling is beneficial to food producer to attract consumers towards their products with respect to its nutritional content. The nutrition information on food labels helps consumers to compare products more easily, determine the nutritional value of foods and better manage special diets.

Shopping tips for consumers

- Read the ingredients what you are really getting

- Watch for sugar content and calories
- Look at the serving size and servings per container
- Look at nutrients to limit (fat and cholesterol)

References

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