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## Health



### 8 Fixes Nutritionists Want on Food Labels

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Starting in December, packages of M&M's and Skittles will have a new nutrition stamp that will show in simpler terms the percentage of daily recommended fat, salt, sugar, fat, and saturated fat levels each serving contains. It got me thinking about other potentially helpful changes to food labels, especially after reading in the latest *New York Times Magazine* that Michael Pollan, author of *In Defense of Food*, thinks labels ought to include how much fossil fuel energy went into the food's production.

So I contacted nutritionists, dietitians, and nutrition scientists and asked them to brainstorm what they'd like to add, subtract, or change on food nutrition labels. Here are some of their ideas:

- **Make serving sizes realistic.** These can be misleading if they don't reflect actual habits. Christopher Gardner, a nutrition scientist at the Stanford Prevention Research Center, suggests that if the package were given to 100 people, the serving size should reflect what the average person actually ate. And use ounces and cups rather than grams, adds Heather Bauer, founder of Nu-Train, a nutrition counseling center in New York City and author of *The Wall Street Diet*.
- **Better explain the percentage daily value (DV).** Make clear whether the recommended percentage for a nutrient is a ceiling or a floor, Gardner says. For example, if a food has 30 percent of the recommended DV of saturated fat, you don't need to eat more at another meal to get up to the 100 percent level; that DV is a maximum recommendation. For vitamins and minerals, the recommended daily value is a minimum, which means you'll need to get the whole amount somewhere. In addition, those recommendations are based on a 2,000-calorie diet for adults, which may be too much for people trying to lose weight and doesn't apply to kids, says Sari Greaves, a dietitian and spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.
- **Give a percentage daily value for sugar.** Right now there is no ceiling for recommended sugar consumption. There should be, says Gardner. He and Jayne Hurley, senior nutritionist for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, also recommend that the total sugar content should be subdivided into added sugars, from sources like cane juice and high-fructose corn syrup, and naturally occurring sugars, from whole foods like fruit and milk.
- **Require that caffeine content be listed.** It's found in products you may not expect, like coffee ice cream. And many people are sensitive to even small amounts, says Tara Gidus, a nutrition performance coach and ADA spokesperson. For the same reason, the amount of artificial sweeteners should be listed, she says.
- **Give more information about whole grains.** The amount of whole grains in a product can be difficult to figure out, Hurley and Gidus say. They recommended the amount in grams and percentage of the food be added. Same with fruit, says Hurley: If a product's name mentions fruit, its label should tell exactly how much is really fruit.
- **Include a list of healthy pairings with the product.** On a cereal label, pairings could include skim milk, berries, flax seeds, and the like, says Bauer.

• **Explain where the food came from.** On her blog, Arlene Birt, visual storyteller for media and marketing firm Haberman & Associates, gives examples of packaging that explains a product's origins. A chocolate bar wrapper, for example, could have a short, visually compelling story showing where the ingredients came from, how and by whom it was made, and how it got to the store.

• **Make it simple with color-coding or scores.** As some grocery stores are doing, food labels could include a numerical score, red/yellow/green designation, or a star rating system to indicate whether the food has more or fewer healthy characteristics (high in fiber, lower in sugar, high in omega-3s, etc.), says Gardner. That same rating system could be expanded to include other criteria, such as sustainability, growing practices, or carbon footprints, he says.

<http://www.usnews.com/blogs/on-fitness/2008/10/17/8-fixes-nutritionists-want-on-food-labels.html>