



NUTRITION LABELLING

The Issue

It is estimated that the economic burden of poor diet in Canada is \$6.6 billion annually, including direct health care costs of \$1.8 billion. Canadians are becoming more conscious of the health effects of the foods they eat and want to make better choices.

Background

Previously, nutrition labelling was voluntary and information was not always presented in the same way, making it difficult for consumers to compare products. To help Canadians make more informed choices about the foods they are eating, Health Canada introduced new nutrition labelling regulations. With the new regulations, foods will be labelled with more complete, consistent and accessible nutrition information.

Nutrition Labelling Regulations

The new regulations, introduced on January 1, 2003, require labels on most prepackaged food to carry a Nutrition Facts table that lists Calories and 13 key nutrients in a specified amount of foods. The nutrients are presented this way:

Nutrition Facts

Per 125mL (87g)

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 80	
Fat 0.5 g	1%
Saturated 0 g + Trans 0 g	0%
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 0 mg	0%
Carbohydrate 18 g	6%
Fibre 2 g	8%
Sugars 2 g	
Protein 3 g	
Vitamin A 2%	Vitamin C 10%
Calcium 0%	Iron 2%

These nutrients were chosen because health professionals, scientists and consumers consider them to be the most important to the health of Canadians.

Large companies were given up to three years and small businesses five years to comply with the regulations (Jan. 1, 2006 and 2008 respectively). Some manufacturers have chosen to put the Nutrition Facts table on labels right away. These manufacturers will be required to update the listed nutrition facts whenever they choose to make new content claims or health claims.

Some foods and beverages, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, alcoholic beverages, foods sold only in retail establishments where they are prepared, and individual servings of food intended for immediate consumption are exempt from the new requirements.



In addition, the new regulations update criteria for nutrient content claims and allow manufacturers in Canada to make diet-related health claims for their products for the first time. For example, specific claims about reducing the risk of heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis and high blood pressure will be allowed.

The Benefits of Nutrition Labelling

The Nutrition Facts table provides easy-to-find, easy-to-use and easy-to-read information that will help you:

- understand the nutritional value of the food you eat, and
- compare products more easily.

The new requirements are also important to the millions of Canadians and their family members who have, or are at risk of, chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke, to help them better manage special diets.

In addition to adopting the pattern of eating recommended in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, some Canadians may need to limit their intake of a nutrient (such as fat, saturated fat, trans fat or sodium) while others may need to increase their intake of a nutrient (such as fibre, vitamin A, calcium or iron). Canadians who are trying to follow nutrient specific recommendations, like limiting salt (sodium), can use the % Daily Value to quickly assess if foods have lower percentages of the nutrient

they are trying to limit. The information will also allow those who require more of a specific nutrient to make an informed choice.

Health Canada estimates that the new nutrition labels could save about \$5.3 billion over the next 20 years in direct and indirect health costs. Such costs include treating some types of cancer, diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke.

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada and its partners are also undertaking public education to help Canadians understand and use the new Nutrition Facts table. The Nutrition Labelling Toolkit for Educators has been developed to help dietitians and other health providers educate Canadians about nutrition labelling. A distinct package has also been developed for Aboriginal communities. These Kits contain fact sheets, a ready-to-use presentation, consumer tear-sheets, posters, sample Nutrition Facts tables and Questions and Answers.

The new regulations will be enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. They will respond to enquiries related to compliance and enforcement activities.

Need More Info?

Posters and a Tearsheet are available for consumers, to help understand the nutrition information on food labels. They can be ordered by calling:
1 800 O-Canada
(1 800 622-6232)
TTY/TDD 1 800 465-7735

The Toolkit for Educators and other nutrition-related information, including Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating can all be found at Health Canada's Web site:
www.healthcanada.ca/nutritionlabelling

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's frequently asked questions regarding nutrition labelling can be located at:
www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeli/nutrition-part1e.shtml#qa

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:
www.healthcanada.ca/iyh
You can also call (613) 957-2991