



The Consumer Voice in Europe

Make the healthy choice
the easy choice

The case for a multifaceted
approach

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A year on: where do we stand?

Last year to **help consumers make healthier and more informed food choices** we ...

... asked policy-makers to:

- **Set nutrient profiles**
- **Provide guidance on portion sizes**
- **End special treatment for botanical claims**

... recommended:

- The use of **colour-coded nutrition labels**

A year on: where do we stand?

Nutrient profiles

- No nutrient profiles; no consultation and no proposal

! Their relevance is now questioned in EC's Roadmap !

Portion sizes

- No guidance published; not considered a priority for EC

Botanical claims

- Exemption for botanical claims to pass EFSA's evaluation remains

! Need to have a strict scientific evaluation of the claims now questioned in EC's Roadmap !

Mind the claims

Why does it matter to consumers?

"Promotes bone health", "antioxidant", "low fat", "helps digestion"... You might have seen claims like these on packages of yoghurt, biscuits, and cereal bars to name just a few. These product claims are a serious matter, as most of us trust them. The aim of labelling should not be to make food products appear healthier than they actually are, but to help us make healthier choices.

Supermarket check

Our Austrian member VKI found claims about calcium and multivitamins on the packaging of kids branded biscuits. Such claims should not be allowed to end up on products filled with sugar, salt and fat.

Tip

Don't forget that a box of cereals which claims to have lots of vitamin D and whole grain can still be a sugary bomb.

What is going on?

Illegal claims can still be found on some food products despite a major clean-up by the EU.

Some food producers have found a clever way to continue making their products appear healthier than they really are. They simply add vitamins or minerals so that they can legally claim that their food product "boosts the immune system" or "helps digestion".

Can yoghurt really boost your immune system?



Misleading portions

Why does it matter to consumers?

40g of crisps, 25g of peanuts, 20 cl of fruit juice... You have probably seen serving sizes like these written on food packages. But do you know what quantities these figures actually represent? Many portions underestimate the amount of food we eat in one sitting, and you may be swallowing more calories, sugar, salt and saturated fat than you are aware of.

Supermarket check

In the Netherlands, our member Consumentenbond discovered a package of three cookies that displayed the serving size and calorie count for a single cookie. But who eats only one cookie when the item has three? It would be easy to think that your total caloric intake was 93 calories (one cookie) instead of the actual 246 (three cookies).

(2015)

Tip

Do you want to eat half of a pizza or the entire pie? Make sure that the information on the label properly reflects the amount that you plan to eat and not just a fraction of it.

What is going on?

Serving sizes often correspond to only a small portion of the entire package



In the UK Which? found a salad that could easily be eaten in full but which was labelled as containing seven servings (2015)



Why does it matter to consumers?

Green tea to help you lose weight quickly? Ginseng pills to make your hair shiny? Some botanical products promise this kind of magic. They are sold as pills, powders or tablets, and are usually made of plants, algae, fungi or lichens. It is very easy to get hold of botanicals, either over-the-counter or online. However, since the claims on the packages may be unproven, you might spend a small fortune on an elixir that does not deliver on its promises.

Supermarket check

In Italy, Altroconsumo found berries that claim to help prevent heart disease and premature ageing due to trace elements and antioxidants. The only proven effect however is the enrichment of its seller to the tune of €19.50 for each pack sold.

Altroconsumo, 2014

Tip

Be wary of the health claims advertised on plant and herbal substances: the miracle they promise may be an expensive mirage.

What is going on?

Botanicals can claim to perform wonders with no scientific backing. Approximately 2,000 claims made on botanical packages are yet to be checked. In 2009, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) analysed 500 out of these 2,000 claims. None of them was found to be scientifically proven. Soon after however, the European Commission gave in to strong industry pressure and put the evaluation on hold.

Can herbal tea actually help you get slimmer?



There is no proof it can.



Why colour-coded schemes?

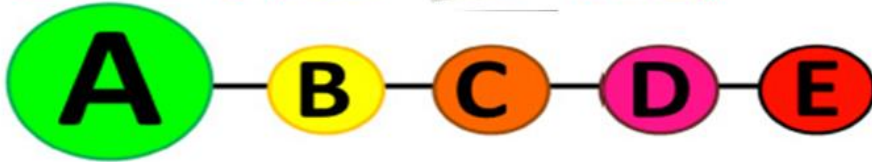
□ What do we know?

- Today's labels remain difficult to **read** and **interpret**
- 'Better for you' labels are **not always well understood** and have **limited benefits**
 - Irrelevant to help **spot high levels of salt, sugar or saturated fat**

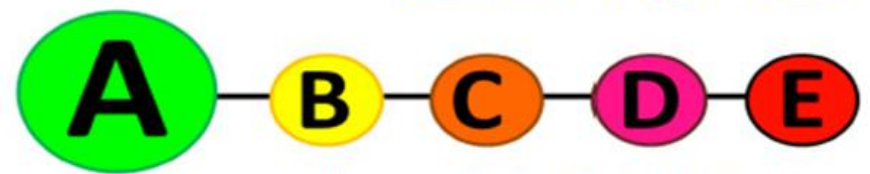
□ What is needed?

- **Interpretative elements** that help consumers compare **similar products** in the same category **at-a-glance**
- Particularly useful for **processed foods** which are usually the one with high levels of sugar, salt and saturates

Food marketed to kids more unhealthy than food marketed to adults



UFC Que-Choisir, Etiquetage nutritionnel: de la clarté, enfin!, 2015



UFC Que-Choisir, Etiquetage nutritionnel: de la clarté, enfin!, 2015

BEUC demands

We want **nutrient profiles**

Prominently displaying claims on the FOP of HFSS foods (because of some added vitamins) misleads consumers into thinking that low-nutrient food is healthy.

We want **botanical claims to go through EFSA scientific assessment**

Consumers should not be duped by unscientific claims promising health miracles.

We want **colour-coded schemes**

It is not enough to stamp healthier products. Without colour-coded labels low-nutrient caloric food will not be easy to spot by consumers.

We want **obvious and realistic portions on package**

Labelling can only be helpful if it refers to reliable portion sizes.

Labelling alone is no silver bullet

Make healthier and more informed food choices requires **a package of measures** beyond better labelling including:

- The development of **healthier food products** (*across all ranges of products and all categories*)
- **Regulation governing the marketing of HFSS foods to children**
- **Changing our food environment** into one that makes the healthy choice the easy and the preferred choice (*HFSS food available at check outs, special offers, etc.*)



Tip

Check labels when shopping, and keep in mind that a product is very salty with levels above 1.5g/100g.

What is going on?

Voluntary salt reduction does not go far enough. Following a call to action by national governments, many food businesses across Europe have committed to voluntarily slashing salt levels in their products over the past years. Although it may be true that salt levels have dropped in some foodstuffs, there is still ample room for improvement. Tests carried out by BEUC members show that salt levels remain unchanged in most products, and in some have even increased.

Supermarket check

Watch out, some sandwiches sold in the UK may contain more than 50% of the daily recommended amount of salt, our British member Which? has warned in 2015.

Time to act?

Action at the European level is key, as our food products travel within the single market before reaching our plates. The European Commission should cooperate with Member States in setting clear salt reduction targets for several food categories. For instance, targets for bread should be different from those for instant soups. Businesses should be obliged to meet these targets, while national authorities will need to monitor whether salt levels stay within the agreed-upon parameters.

Fancy a pizza?



More than 50% of tested frozen pizza in Germany contained over 5g of salt, i.e. the limit you should not exceed in one day.



Children: an easy marketing target

Why does it matter to you?

One of every three children in Europe is either overweight or obese. The World Health Organisation has identified the consumption of products high in fat, sugar and salt as the main culprit. The marketing of these foods detrimentally influences preferences from a young age, and interferes with parents' efforts to provide healthy diets for their children.

Supermarket check

Each year Spanish children see on average over 2,500 TV ads for food. 69% are for sugar-loaded dairy products, biscuits, chocolates and fast food.

Source: OCU

Tip

Companies reach out to children through relatively inexpensive viral marketing and social media channels which often escape parental oversight. If you are a parent, try to keep an eye on the amount of food marketing your little ones are exposed to.

What is going on?

Voluntary rules do not work. There is currently no European legislation that covers the marketing of food to children. Only a few Member States have national laws, and most initiatives are led by the food industry. In 2012, several big food and beverage

If children's meals looked like the advertising they are exposed to, 80% of their plates would be filled with fast food and snacks



Fruit and vegetables would account for just 0.2% of the meal



Supermarket check

Our Swiss member FRC found that sweets, biscuits, and the like were placed at children's eye level next to the checkout in nearly 90 percent of supermarkets. A nightmare for parents!

(2013)

Tip

When food shopping, check out the products below eye level: you might find some healthier options on the other shelves.

What is going on?

The unhealthy choice is the easy choice. Just think about the vending machine at your office or in the airport. Does it contain any healthy options? Or think about how often you get a special deal when you choose the XXL menu in a chain restaurant. Eating an unhealthy diet can increase your risk for cancer, diabetes and heart disease. But the good news is that a change in diet can in many cases help prevent these problems.

Our Spanish member OCU has spotted kids' meals in fast food restaurants that offer all-you-can-drink soda. This is a rotten choice for children: one small glass of soda contains between four and five lumps of sugar, close to the recommended daily limit.

Can you resist putting that sugar-laden cereal bar next to the checkout in your trolley?



Thank you



The Consumer Voice in Europe



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