



FOOD LABELS: NUTRITION CLAIMS – PART II

Nutrition claims are statements that describe the presence, absence or level of a nutrient contained in a foodstuff, or its value compared to similar products. It is also any representation that states, suggests or implies that a relationship exists between a food, nutrient, or other substance in a food and a disease or health-related condition. These claims are usually made to encourage the consumer to purchase a particular food. It is important that as consumers we understand what these terms mean so that we can make educated choices about the foods we eat.

- Nutrient Function Claims
- Comparative Claims
- Health Claims.

Nutrient Content Claim

The most common one encountered is a nutrient content claim. It is used to describe the level of nutrients contained in a food. They are related to common terms such as 'lite' and 'free' as well as specific nutrients or food components such as sodium or sugar. The approved definitions of some of these terms are given below.

- *Calories*

To be **calorie free** a food must have less than 5 kcal per reference amount or serving on the label.

To be **Low in calories**, a food must be less than 40 kcal or less per serving and if the serving is 30g or less or 2 table-spoons or less per 50 g of the food. This means that manufacturers cannot just make their serving size un n a t u r a l l y small and then claim that it's low in fat.

A **Reduced/fewer or less calorie** food must have 25% fewer/less calories than an appropriate reference food. For example vanilla ice cream must be compared with vanilla ice cream, not chocolate ice cream. The reference food cannot be low calories.



Types of Claims

There are several types of nutrition claims:

- Nutrient Content Claims

Light/Lite. This is a nutritionally altered product that contains one-third fewer calories or half the fat of the reference food. If more than 50% of the calories in the food comes from fat the light/lite food must have at least a 50% reduction in fat, if less than 50% of the calories are from fat the same fat reduction applies or at least a 1/3 reduction in calories when compared to the reference amount.

The term "light" still can be used to describe such properties as texture and colour, as long as the label explains the intent – for example, "light brown sugar" and "light and fluffy".

- **Total fat**

Fat free foods have less than 0.5 g total fat per reference amount and per labeled serving.

Low fat foods have 3 g or less of total fat per reference amount (and per 50 g if reference amount is small).

Reduced means a nutritionally altered product that contains at least 25% less of a nutrient or of calories than the regular, or reference product.

Less/fewer fat foods have at least 25% less fat per reference amount than an appropriate reference food.

A food can be a percentage fat free if the food meets the requirements for low fat foods.

- **Saturated fat**

Fat free foods have less than 0.5g of fat per serving.

Saturated fat free foods have less than 0.5 g saturated fat per serving and the level of trans fatty acids does not exceed 1% total fat.

Low saturated fat foods have 1 g or less saturated fat per reference amount and 15% or less of calories from saturated fats.

Reduced/less saturated fat foods have at least 25% less saturated fat per reference amount than an appropriate reference food.

Next to all saturated fat claims, the manufacturer must declare the amount of cholesterol if 2 mg or more cholesterol is present per reference amount; and the amount of total fat if more than 3 g per reference amount (or 0.5 g or more of total fat for "Saturated Fat Free").

- **Cholesterol**

Cholesterol free foods contain less than 2 mg per reference amount and per labelled serving of cholesterol.

Low cholesterol foods contain 20 mg or less cholesterol per reference amount (and per 50 g of food if reference amount is small).

Reduced/less cholesterol foods have at least 25% less cholesterol per reference amount than an appropriate reference food.

Cholesterol claims are only allowed when food contains 2 g

or less saturated fat per reference amount.

- **Sodium**

Sodium free foods contain less than 5 mg per reference amount and per labelled serving of sodium.

Low sodium foods contain 140 mg or less sodium per reference amount (and per 50 g of food if reference amount is small).

Reduced/less sodium foods have at least 25% less sodium per reference amount than an appropriate reference food.

"**Light**" (for sodium reduced products) can be used if food is "Low Calorie" and "Low Fat" and sodium is reduced by at least 50%.

"**Light in Sodium**" can be used if sodium is reduced by at least 50% per reference amount.

A "**Very Low Sodium**" food must have 35 mg or less sodium per reference amount (and per 50 g if reference amount is small).

Salt free foods must be sodium free.

"**No Salt Added**" and "**Unsalted**" foods mean what they say but must declare "This is Not A Sodium Free Food" on information panel if food is not "Sodium Free".

"**Lightly Salted**" foods must contain 50% less sodium than is normally added to reference food and if it is not "Low Sodium", it must say so on the label.



- **Sugar**

“**Sugar Free**” foods contain less than 0.5 g sugars per reference amount and per labelled serving. There is no such thing as a low sugar food since there is no specific recommended sugar intake.

In **Reduced/less sugar** foods there are at least 25% less sugars per reference amount than an appropriate reference food.

“**No Added Sugars**” and “**Without Added Sugars**” mean that no sugar or sugar containing ingredient is added during processing. It must be stated if food is not “**Low**” or “**Reduced Calorie**”.

The terms “**Unsweetened**” and “**No Added Sweeteners**” mean what they say.

- **Nutrients**

For a food to be high in a particular nutrient, generally speaking it must provide at least 20% of the recommended daily allowance of that nutrient.

Comparative Claims

A comparative claim compares the nutrient level and/or energy value of two or more foods. For example: “**Reduced**”, “**Less than**”, “**Fewer**”, “**Increased**”, “**More than**”. These claims must, however be comparing the same or similar foods and the foods being compared must be clearly identified.

Vitamin K
Food sources of vitamin K include cabbage, cauliflower, spinach and other green, leafy vegetables, as well as cereals



Nutrient Function/Structure Function Claims

This claim describes the physiological role of the nutrient in growth, development and



normal functions of the body. In this type of claim the manufacturer may state the relationship between a food ingredient and a normal bodily function without mention of any specific disease condition. For example, a food label may state “**calcium helps to build strong bones**” or “**Vitamin E protects fats in body tissues from oxidation**” or “**Contains folic acid; folic acid contributes to the normal growth of the foetus**”. This is a different type of claim than one that says “**calcium prevents osteoporosis**”. This is an example of a health claim.

There are very strict requirements for making these types of claims. A food must be a significant source of the nutrient in question before a claim can be made about that nutrient in a food. In the case of essential nutrients the food must provide at least 10% of the NRV in a reasonable day's intake. For example a breakfast cereal may contain some amount of calcium, but the manufacturer cannot make a nutrition claim about the calcium in the cereal unless one

serving (assuming the consumer will eat one serving) contains at least 10% of the recommendation for calcium. If you have to eat the whole box in one sitting to reach the 10% the cereal cannot make the claim.

In addition there are other criteria related to the strength of evidence supporting the claim and even the actual wording of the claim that must be met before manufacturers are given leave to make these statements on their product.

Health Claims

This is any statement that states, suggests or implies that a relationship exists between a food, nutrient and or other substance in a food and a disease or health-related condition. There are two essential components of a health claim:

- A substance (whether a food, food component, or dietary ingredient).
- A disease or health-related condition.

Simply having a picture of a heart on your food product is considered a health claim. Some types of health claims may not be allowed even though there is strong scientific evidence to support them and the food is a rich source of the nutrient. For example, a food rich in niacin, may be labelled with the claim that niacin is important in the prevention of the disease pellagra. But governing bodies would not allow this statement as a health claim unless it also states that pellagra is not a

condition commonly experienced or that people are not particularly at risk for developing it under current economic and social conditions.

The following table lists some allowed health claims.

There are many steps taken to make nutrition claims as accurate and as trustworthy as possible. Still many consumers are skeptical and do not readily believe nutrition claims because:

1. There may be confusion in the way that the information is provided or what information is provided. In some foods the label says one thing in front and the nutrition facts say another at the back. Consumers may ask questions like how does that say reduced fat free but have more than the expected number of calories when compared to the full fat version? What is not stated outright is that the fat removed is replaced by other compounds to retain the taste and texture the fat would have given the food. These compounds usually contribute to the overall calories in the foods.

2. Some manufacturers use misleading labeling practices. For example, you may buy

ALLOWED HEALTH CLAIM	ALLOWED HEALTH CLAIM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calcium and osteoporosis • Fat and cancer • Saturated fat and cholesterol and coronary heart disease (CHD) • Fibre-containing grain products, fruits and vegetables and cancer • Fruits, vegetables and grain products that contain fibre and the risk of CHD • Sodium and hypertension (high blood pressure) • Fruits and vegetables and cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folic acid and neural tube defects • Dietary sugar alcohols and dental caries (cavities) • Soluble fibre from certain foods, such as whole oats and psyllium seed husk, and heart disease • Soy Protein and risk of CHD • Plant sterol/stanol esters and risk of CHD • Whole grain foods and risk of heart disease and certain cancers • Potassium and the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.

a beverage labelled mango and papaya juice in big bold letters but the list of ingredients show that there is very little and sometimes no mango or papaya juice in your beverage: there may be as little as 3% juice of any type in the bottle. Careful scrutiny of the front label and the fine print then tells you that it is a mango and papaya flavoured juice drink. Those two words make all the difference but because you do not immediately see them, it is easy to feel duped.

3. They feel that Nutrition professionals always seem to be changing their tune.

Consumers have gotten tired of hearing one thing one day and then a contradiction a while later. Consumers need to understand that as technology improves more is learnt about foods and how they function. This must then be passed on to them.

It is hoped that with greater education and clarification of the terms, consumers can learn to trust the information that they receive, or at least decipher the double talk that is the unavoidable consequence of marketing. ♦

For further information contact: *Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute.*

Points to remember when reading labels

Always read the fine print : a drink is not a juice; cheese flavoured does not always mean that there is cheese.

Read the list of ingredients : remember the most plentiful ingredient by weight is listed first and the list continues from largest to smallest amounts.

Pay close attention to the number of servings in the container : do not assume that the container (especially with beverages) is only one serving: it may contain more than one serving. If you eat or drink all of it you may be consuming far more calories, fats and other nutrients than you realise