



NUTRITION TIP

FDA Clears Way for More Health Claims

Reading food labels just got a little more complicated thanks to a recent decision by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Beginning this fall, the FDA will accept applications from food manufacturers that would allow them to make health claims on food labels without corroborating scientific proof.

Under this new program, health claims will be graded according to the level of science that exists to support the claim: A for scientifically proven claims; B if the science is good but inconclusive; C for claims that have very little science to support them; and D is given to claims with little or no science behind them.

Claims rated B, C or D will be considered qualified and be allowed to appear on the food label along with a short disclaimer describing the level of proof that exists for that claim. It has not yet been determined if the grade itself will appear on the label.

Previously, the FDA has upheld a very strict standard regarding health claims made on food labels. Very few claims were allowed; for example, oatmeal manufacturers could not claim their product was heart healthy until a significant scientific consensus was reached that the fiber in oatmeal has a positive effect on cholesterol levels.

According to FDA Commissioner Mark McClellan, this change was made to give Americans as much information as possible about the foods they consume.

"Americans shouldn't need a science degree to figure out how foods can fit into a healthy diet. Information should be accurate, honest and easy to understand."

Not everyone is happy about the change. Congressman Henry Waxman, D-California, believes these new labels will cause confusion and may make all health claims meaningless – even the accurate ones. Waxman was instrumental in passing a law limiting food labeling more than a decade ago and believes this new policy violates that law.

Claims expected to win a B rating by the FDA:

- Eating several servings per week of salmon and other fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of heart disease
- Foods made with vegetable oils are more heart healthy than those made with solid fats
- Eating nuts instead of other high-fat proteins is good for the heart

Claims that could receive a B or C rating by the FDA:

- Eating fiber-rich foods can help prevent colon cancer
- Compounds in grapes and grape juice are good for the heart
- The antioxidant lycopene, found in cooked tomato products, may prevent prostate cancer



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What You Buy Isn't Always What You Get

You may have finally mastered the art of reading food labels, but that won't do you much good if the labels themselves are inaccurate.

A new report by an independent testing organization called ConsumerLab indicates that a majority of nutrition bars - also called energy, protein or diet bars - do not live up to their health claims and many labels mistake the amount of carbohydrates the bars contain.

Of the 30 bars tested, 18 were improperly labeled, including Atkins Advantage nutrition bar and Carb Solutions, a protein bar made by Richardson Labs.

Both companies have been scrutinized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which sent out warning letters to these and 16 other companies informing them that their bars were misbranded, adulterated and in violation of the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act.

Atkins Nutritionals and a coalition of other nutrition bar manufacturers have acceded to the government's demands and are now in the process of creating new labels.

Additionally, 15 of the 30 bars tested contained more carbohydrate than indicated on their labels.

Over the past year, low-carbohydrate bars have been among the fastest-growing segments of the \$1.5 billion snack bar market. Atkins Nutritionals alone has sold more than \$30 million worth of bars in the past year.

Many companies make the low-carb claim by not including the polydextrose and glycerine, both complex carbohydrate sweeteners, in their carbohydrate count. The FDA recently ruled that these and other sweeteners such as xylitol must be included in the count of total carbohydrates and bars that contain these sweeteners cannot be labeled as low-carb.

Source: ConsumerLab; www.consumerlab.com



NUTRITION TIP

Don't Skip Breakfast to Cut Calories

When it comes to cutting calories, breakfast is often the first thing to go.

But new research suggests that people who are successful at losing weight – and, more importantly, keeping it off – eat breakfast every day.

Researchers from the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver analyzed data on nearly 3,000 people who had lost, on average, 70 pounds and kept it off for a year or more.

Study subjects were enrolled in the National Weight Control Registry, which is an ongoing study of adults who have successfully lost 30 pounds or more. Only four percent said they never eat breakfast every day.

It is not known what subjects ate for breakfast (although the study was funded by cereal giant General Mills), but most followed a high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet.

Researchers speculate that eating breakfast helps people manage both their hunger and food intake throughout the day.

Source: Conference of the American Society for Clinical Nutrition, February 26, 2002, San Diego, Calif.



NUTRITION TIP

Eating Fatty Fish Cuts Risk of Heart Disease

Two new studies offer more evidence that eating several servings of fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids each week may reduce the risk of heart disease and death.

The first study, conducted by researchers from Brigham and Woman's Hospital in Boston, compared 94 men who died suddenly from heart disease with 184 healthy men.

They discovered that men without heart disease were 81 percent less likely to experience sudden death if they had high levels of omega-3 fatty acids in their blood, regardless of other risk factors such as age or smoking habits.

Found in fatty fish such as salmon and mackerel, omega-3 fatty acids are believed to lower the risk of developing an irregular heart rhythm and to reduce blood cholesterol and clotting.

A second study, published in a recent issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, looked at data from 85,000 women involved in the Nurses Health Study and found those who consumed at least five servings of fish per week lowered their risk of coronary heart disease by more than 33 percent and cut their risk of fatal heart attack by 50 percent.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among Americans, and 50 percent of people who die suddenly of cardiac causes had no previous signs or symptoms of heart disease.

"Mounting evidence suggests that there is an inverse association between fish intake and heart disease in women and men," writes study author Dr. JoAnn E. Mason.

"We recommend that people eat more fish as part of a healthy diet."

Source: The New England Journal of Medicine, 2002; 346, 1113-1118; The Journal of the American Medical Association, 2002; 287, 1815-1821.



NUTRITION TIP

Vegetarians Be A-Ware!

Vegetarians may be at risk of not consuming enough vitamin A and iron and should increase the amount of dark-colored fruits and vegetables in their diets.

This is the latest recommendation from the Institute of Medicine panel, which adjusted the recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) of vitamin A and several other nutrients.

Vegetarians generally rely on foods such as carrots, broccoli and sweet potatoes to meet their vitamin A requirement, but new research suggests the body is only able to absorb about half the amount of usable nutrient as was previously thought.

Non-vegetarians typically consume enough vitamin A, which is essential for reducing the risk of birth defects and guaranteeing optimal vision, from dairy products, fish and liver.

The RDA for vitamin A is now 900 micrograms per day for men and 700 micrograms per day for women. This requirement can be met by eating a half-cup of cooked carrots.

As for iron, vegetarians may need to double their intake because the body absorbs this mineral less efficiently from cereals, bread and vegetables than it does from meats.

Source: International Journal of Eating Disorders, 2001; 29, 23-38.



NUTRITION TIP

Tomatoes and Apples, Edible Essentials

A new study suggests that apples and tomatoes may help prevent respiratory disease.

Researchers at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom studied 2,633 adults in 1991 and again in 2000 and found a link between the intake of apples and tomatoes and the subjects' respiratory health.

Those who ate five apples or three tomatoes per week scored highest on a test that measured the amount of air a person can expel from the lungs in one second.

Lead researcher Emma Broadfield and colleagues theorize that the high levels of antioxidants in these two foods may have a beneficial effect on lung function.

Source: 97th Annual Meeting of the American Thoracic Society, May, 20, 2001, San Francisco, Calif.



NUTRITION TIP

Green Tea Sparks Your Metabolism

Green tea has had more than its fair share of good press lately, with several studies touting its protective effect against heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis and tumors.

Now a new, albeit small, study out of Switzerland reports that green tea may have the power to raise metabolic rates, speed up fat oxidation and help people lose weight.

Ten healthy men consumed either green tea extract, which contains 50 milligrams of caffeine, 50 milligrams of caffeine alone, or no caffeine at all. Only the group that consumed the green tea extract showed any increase in metabolic rate.

Researchers suspect that the powerful antioxidants found in green tea, along with the caffeine, are responsible for its higher fat-burning effects.

Source: American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, December 1999



NUTRITION TIP

Trans Fat-Free Fast Food Coming

When it comes to being health conscious, McDonald's and Frito-Lay aren't exactly trailblazers, but both companies took a huge leap forward recently by announcing they were switching cooking oils to reduce and even eliminate trans fat in many popular foods.

Diets high in trans fat have been linked to elevated levels of cholesterol and an increased risk of heart disease.

McDonald's will begin cooking its fries and other fried foods in a new oil that reduces trans fatty acids by 48 percent and saturated fat by 16 percent.

Frito-Lay will eliminate all trans fat from three of its most popular brands of chips: Doritos, Cheetos and Tostitos. Calorie and overall fat totals, however, will largely remain the same.

Many believe McDonald's and Frito-Lay will be just the first of many companies to make the switch following the Food and Drug Administration's proposal to require warning labels on food containing trans fats.



NUTRITION TIP

Tips for Choosing Herbal Products

- Always inform your physician about any herbs or supplements you presently take. Herbs often interact with prescription medications, resulting in unwanted, sometimes serious, side effects. A recent report concluded that while 15 million Americans taking prescription medication also take herbs, only 60 percent mentioned it to their physicians.
- Look for products that offer standardized preparations. This means that every bottle, every pill, always contains the exact same amount of products. Purchasing bargain or lesser-known brands that do not carry the assurance of standardization means you could end up with little or no product or, worse, substances you didn't intend on taking.
- Take the time to gather any available research on the herbs you plan to take. While it is preferable to buy from companies that do their own research, you don't want to use their research as your sole source of information.

There are several good books on the market that clearly explain the potential benefits and drawbacks of various supplements, and although there isn't a huge body of scientific evidence available, quite a bit is known about the most popular substances such as ginkgo biloba, St. John's Wort and ginseng.



NUTRITION TIP

Hungry? It May Be All In Your Head

How do you know when you're hungry? Or when you're full? Is it your stomach or your brain that gives you the signal?

Sure, that noisy growl or the pull on your waistband are telltale signs, but chemicals in your brain called neurotransmitters are much more reliable - and quicker to respond.

For some time, serotonin has reigned supreme as the mood-regulating neurotransmitter. Several popular diet drugs operate on the premise that by increasing the amount of time serotonin hangs around in the brain, the easier it is to keep one's appetite in check.

But serotonin has some new competition: CART peptide, or cocaine-and-amphetamine-regulated transcript.

Yes, cocaine. Researchers at Yerkes Primate Research Center at Emory University in Atlanta discovered the CART peptide while conducting studies on this narcotic.

They found that when normal rats were injected with CART they ate 30 percent less than usual. Researchers are hopeful their discovery may eventually lead to another anti-obesity drug.

Of course, what works in rats doesn't always work in humans, particularly since humans eat for numerous reasons, many of which have little or nothing to do with hunger.

But studies such as these remind us of how eager Americans are to solve their weight problems with a pill - and how anxious pharmaceutical companies are to develop one that will do just that.

We can't help wondering what would happen if they discovered a pill that made people want to exercise.

Source: Synapse, April 29, 1998



NUTRITION TIP

The Value of Vegetables and Fruits

Researchers in Scotland are serving up further proof that eating fruits and vegetables is good for you.

A comparison of vegetarians and non-vegetarians revealed that vegetarians have higher blood levels of salicylic acid, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug present in fruits and vegetables.

Salicylic acid is also the active ingredient in aspirin, which is given to people to help prevent heart attacks because it helps to block the formation of blood clots.

Researchers believe the high concentration of salicylic acid in these foods may help explain other studies that revealed low levels of heart disease among people who eat lots of these good-for-you foods.

Source: Journal of Clinical Pathology 2001; 54, 553-555





NUTRITION TIP

Face Facts

Despite frequent warnings about the dangers of inactivity and obesity, most adults don't see their weight as a problem.

A recent survey of nearly 1,400 physicians and patients revealed the following:

- Only 39 percent of adults consider themselves overweight. The U.S. government, however, estimates more than 60 percent of adults are overweight or obese.
- Of those who said they were overweight, only about 30 percent were concerned about developing type 2 diabetes, which increases the risk of heart disease, kidney disorders and blindness. Type 2 diabetes is strongly associated with obesity and inactivity.
- According to the physicians surveyed, nearly 30 percent of patients diagnosed as overweight in the past year were 35 years old or younger.

Source: Survey conducted by Yankelovich Partners and supported by a grant from Hoffmann-La Roche