



Nutrition Facts Panel Changes: Combating an Old Problem with a New Look

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Introduction

Since 1994, the Food and Drug Administration has been combating the growing obesity epidemic in the United States through the use of the Nutrition Facts label, the “Spot the Block” program, the formation of “FDA’s Obesity Working Group” and Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move!” Campaign. Now, the iconic Nutrition Facts label, found on processed and packaged foods, is being reformatted by the FDA to reflect the eating habits of the current population and give consumers a greater understanding of nutrition. Michael R. Taylor, FDA’s deputy commissioner for foods and veterinary medicine, said, “By revamping the Nutrition Facts label, FDA wants to make it easier than ever for consumers to make better informed food choices that will support a healthy diet.”

New Nutrition Facts label; What’s different and why?

In an attempt to help consumers better understand the nutritional value of what they buy, the FDA proposed a few adjustments to the Nutrition Facts label. On March 3, 2014, the FDA proposed a new rule that would improve the nutrition label as a tool to help consumers make better, more informed food choices and maintain healthy lifestyles. The proposed rule became finalized on May 20, 2016. As a result, these adjustments are meant to bring more attention to the information consumers generally seek (calories and serving size), avert their attention to other important nutrients and explain Percent Daily Value in more comprehensible terms. While the adjustments are distinct, the overall effect does not change the iconic label too much. Below is a list of the changes and short reasons why the changes have been made. For more in-depth information about the changes and reasonings, visit www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/changes-nutrition-facts-label.

| Proposed Change: | Reasoning: |
|---|--|
| Vitamin A and C will no longer be required. | Current data indicate that Vitamin A and C deficiencies in the general population are not common. These vitamins still would be allowed to be declared on labels on a voluntary basis. |
| Vitamin D and potassium will be added to the Nutrition Facts label. | Vitamin D is important for its role in bone health, and some population groups are not getting enough of it. Adequate potassium intake is beneficial in lowering blood pressure and intakes of this nutrient are low among some population groups. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>The “calories and serving size per container” type size will be increased and bolded.</p> | <p>Many consumers use this information in assessing the nutritional value of the product before buying. The FDA hopes the changes will bring more emphasis to parts of the label that are important in addressing current public health concerns such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.</p> |
| <p>The actual amount of mandatory vitamins and minerals, and those volunteered will be declared.</p> | <p>Reason not specified.</p> |
| <p>Total Carbohydrate will be replaced by “Total Carbs.”</p> | <p>Reason not specified.</p> |
| <p>“Added Sugars” will be listed directly beneath “Sugars.”</p> | <p>The proposed rule would require declaration of “Added Sugars” as well, indented under “Sugars,” to help consumers understand how much sugar is naturally occurring and how much has been added to the product. This proposed change is based on expert recommendations –including those from the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, that Americans should reduce their intake of calories from added sugars.</p> |
| <p>Serving size information will be right-justified.</p> | <p>Reason not specified.</p> |
| <p>Serving Size references will be updated.</p> | <p>New serving sizes will reflect how much food people actually consume today in order to give consumers more accurate information regarding the caloric content in the product. Rather than be diminished, by law, serving sizes must be based on how much food people actually consume and not on what they should eat. For some food manufactures, the serving sizes on their product may potentially increase or decrease as new studies have shown 17 percent of the reference amounts customarily consumed used to calculate serving sizes should be changed.</p> |
| <p>The footnote will be replaced with new information.</p> | <p>The new information will better explain the Percent Daily Value.</p> |

To demonstrate the effects of the new rule, Figure 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of the current Nutrition Facts label and the proposed label.



Figure 1. Comparison of previous and new nutrition label formats.

Dual Column Format



Figure 2. Proposed multi-serving Nutrition Facts Label

For packages containing more than can be eaten in one sitting, there will be a dual column version of the Nutrition Facts label. The left column will have the calorie categories (e.g. total fat, cholesterol, vitamin D, etc.), the middle column contains the calorie content information for a single serving, and the right column will contain the calorie content information for the entire container or package. The FDA will require this format for packages that contain at least two times the serving size and less than or equal to four times the serving size. (See Figure 2.)

These new changes apply to all packaged food, including imports. Manufacturers will need to comply with the new regulation by July 26, 2018; manufacturers with less than \$10 million in annual food sales will have until July 26, 2019, to make these changes. Foods exempt from the updated label are those regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (i.e. certain meat, poultry and egg products). For more information, visit www.fda.gov/food/guidanceregulation/.

References

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The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

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The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.