Children’s Food Campaign fact-sheet: food labelling

Why does food labelling matter?

More and more people want to eat healthily. To help them make healthy choices, it is vital that food labelling clearly shows the nutrient content of food and drink products.

The labelling choice: ‘traffic lights’ vs. ‘percent of GDA’

Two very different labelling schemes are currently being proposed.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) recommends the ‘traffic light’ labelling scheme, which lists the amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt as easy to understand red, amber and green traffic lights. This system is supported by retailers such as Asda, the Co-op, Sainsbury’s and Waitrose.

Food manufactures like Kellogg’s, and retailers like Tesco and Morrison’s, have introduced an alternative based on the percentage in each food of someone’s Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) of a nutrient.

Why we support traffic light labelling

Traffic light labelling is easier to understand. The largest survey comparing the two systems found:

- 62% of people misunderstood ‘percent of GDA’ labels. In comparison, only 21% misunderstood traffic light labels.
- 42% of consumers said that ‘percent of GDA’ labels were too complicated.
- ‘Percent of GDA’ labels took at least 3 seconds longer for individuals to interpret.

(Source: a 2005 Synovate survey for the FSA).

The Skills for Life survey carried out by the Department for Education in 2003 sheds light on the problem with the ‘percent of GDA’ system. It found nearly one in two adults (47%) lacked the numeracy skills to use percentages correctly in the context of measures and observations. So almost half of adults lack the numerical skills to understand ‘percent of GDA’ labelling.

Conclusion:

Traffic light labelling provides consumers – including children – with quick and easy to understand information on whether a product is high in fat, saturated fat, salt or sugar. Evidence from Sainsbury’s has demonstrated that traffic light labelling influences consumers to purchase more healthy food and drink products.

The Children’s Food Campaign ask for your support to ensure all food retailers and manufacturers introduce the FSA’s traffic light labelling scheme. Please write to Caroline Flint MP, Minister for Public Heath, to indicate your support for clear food labelling and copy to letter to: Richard Watts, Children’s Food Campaign, Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

The Children’s Food campaign is supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.
National organisations which support the Children's Food Campaign:


We are also supported by 150 local organisations and over 12,000 members of the public.