

Canada's nutrition labels: a new world standard?

Canada's new nutrition labels, which must include data on key nutrients as well as caloric content, are being touted as the most detailed in the world (www.healthcanada.ca/nutrition/labelling).

"We think this is the gold standard for nutritional labelling," says Bill Jeffery, head of Canada's Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). "Health Canada deserves credit for making this happen."

CSPI, a nonprofit consumer health organization, has lobbied for improved labelling for 6 years. Jeffery says the US branch of

the organization will now use Canada's rules to urge the Food and Drug Administration to improve its labelling standards, and in particular to add information about trans fatty acids and to include labels on ground meat. Jeffery also expects the new rules will create an incentive for companies to reformulate products such as canned soups, which are high in sodium.

Health Canada predicts that the new labels, which must appear on most foods within 5 years, could save Canada \$5 billion through increased productivity and lower health care costs as-

sociated with cancer, diabetes, coronary artery disease and stroke over the next 2 decades.

"Absolutely this is a public health initiative," said Karen Dodds, director general of Health Canada's Food Directorate. She said public education, including a distinct education package for Aboriginals, will help Canadians understand and use the new information to make informed choices about healthy eating. The economic burden of poor dietary habits in Canada is estimated at \$6.3 billion annually, including direct health care costs of \$1.8 billion.

The new regulations require most foods to carry a mandatory Nutrition Facts label. Dodds says meat (except ground) and fresh fruit and vegetables are excluded because these products vary so much that there is no scientific way to verify specific contents.

Tables will be standardized to allow easy comparison among products, and companies will be able to make diet-related health claims — for instance, that a diet low in saturated fat and trans fatty acids may reduce the risk of heart disease.

Dodds said regulations for claims will be "fairly restrictive." Jeffery is "pleasantly surprised" by the changes made since public consultations in 2001. Originally, regulations allowed manufacturers of ketchup and pickles to make claims about the benefits provided by having fruits and vegetables in the diet. —

Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ

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Nutrition Facts

Per 125 mL (87 g)

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 80	
Fat 0.5 g	1 %
Saturated 0 g + Trans 0 g	0 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 0 mg	0 %
Carbohydrate 18 g	6 %
Fibre 2 g	8 %
Sugars 2 g	
Protein 3 g	
Vitamin A 2 %	Vitamin C 10 %
Calcium 0 %	Iron 2 %

New labels: End to inconsistency?