

Diet Choices Made Easier By New Food Labels

WASHINGTON, D.C. — It used to be that the only reading done at a grocery store was at the checkout counter where all the magazines and tabloids are kept. But health conscious Americans are reading in the aisles these days, as they study and compare the nutritional labels on food. Because a well balanced diet is an important factor in health maintenance and disease prevention, experts say it's more important than ever to know what's in the foods we eat.

If you've an avid food label reader, then you should know that the U.S. Government recently changed the requirements for labels on packaged foods. The new labels will have more detailed nutrient information and will allow you to compare that information to government recommendations for a healthy diet.

Food companies have been given until May 1994 to relabel their products, but new labels could start appearing on foods as early as this year. Here's a run-down of key changes to look for:

• **Serving Sizes.** On new labels, serving sizes will have to reflect typical consumption habits. As an example, a 12-ounce can of cola will be considered one serving. Currently, some labels indicate that a 12-ounce can represents two six-ounce servings. Critics point to that as an example of how serving size information can be used to mislead consumers.

• **Calories.** Many products now advertised as low calorie may also be high in unwanted fat. So, in addition to listing the number of calories per serving of a particular product, new labels will also list how many of those calories are from fat.

• **Nutrients.** Like the old labels, the new ones will still list the amounts of nutrients--such as fats, carbohydrates, sodium, protein and fiber. But the new labels put this information in the context of a recommended daily diet of 2,000 calories. A typical current label might show that a single serving of macaroni and cheese has 30 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol. New labels will go a step further by indicating that 30mg of cholesterol is 10% of the suggested daily intake of cholesterol for a person on a 2,000 calorie diet.

• **Daily Intake Table.** All new labels will feature a newly required table suggesting daily intakes of various nutrients based on diets of both 2,000 and 2,500 calories. For example, the table will show that the recommended daily intake of total fat is 65 grams or less for a diet of 2,000 calories, and 85 grams or less for a diet of 2,500 calories.

The government's daily diet recommendations are not hard and fast rules, but they do represent a good general guideline. Food and Drug Administrator David Kessler says consumers should use the information to "fine tune" their diets. Health experts say to set up a diet specific to your individual needs you should contact your personal physician.

New Definitions

In addition to beefing up food labels, the government has standardized definitions for commonly used food packaging terms like "light," "low fat," "fat free," "cholesterol free" and "high fiber." Under the new rules, only food products that have less than 3 grams of fat for every 50 gram serving can be called "low fat." A food must have less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving--and have

no added ingredients containing fat or oil--to be labelled fat free.

Exempted from these new rules are restaurant menus. For the time being, restaurants can call their food "light" or "low fat" without having to meet the definitions of these terms that apply to packaged food. But the exemption for restaurant menus may be short-lived. Consumer groups say the exemption is likely to be overturned in the courts.

Cooking Healthy

The new food labeling rules will allow consumers to make more informed and nutritious shopping choices. But Isabel Hoverman, MD, a trustee with the American Society of Internal Medicine, says selecting healthy foods is only one part of the equation. "Preparing food properly is just as important as choosing the right food," she says.

Dr. Hoverman, an internist in Austin, TX, says steaming, baking, broiling and poaching are health-conscious ways to cook delicious meals. On the other hand, frying food or sauteing it in butter adds unhealthy fat and calories. "It doesn't do much good to carefully select healthy foods if you're going to prepare them in an unhealthy way," says Dr. Hoverman.



Ida's Notebook

Ida Risser

Nowadays when I look out the window by my sink I see birds. Most of the year there are flowers like Shasta daisies, larkspur and roses to add joy to my days. However, now I watch juncos, house finches, blue jays and cardinals at our bird feeder.

It is hung on a low limb of our old apple tree. And, I do mean old as I'd guess that it must be 100

years old. Do apple trees get that old? It has been in our meadow long before I knew anything. I do believe that at some point the center may have been broken and two limbs grew from each side. When we planned a driveway to our new house, a son suggested that it be a circle one around the tree and that is what we did.

This fall and winter our fields have been filled with sea gulls. I'm hoping that they are eating weed seeds and not good seeds. I wonder why these large white and grey birds travel so far from the coast line.

Recently we visited my husband's friend who lives quite a distance from our home and so we seldom see him. They were friends at Penn State more than 50 years ago.

The reason that I am mentioning this is that I recognized similarities in their make-up. They both spend a lot of their leisure time studying maps. They read them like others read books. Another similarity is that their wives agreed their favorite plaything in their new homes was the garage door opener. Even if they come home for 10 minutes and leave again, up and down and up and down goes the garage door. Maybe their likenesses forged a friendship in the first place.

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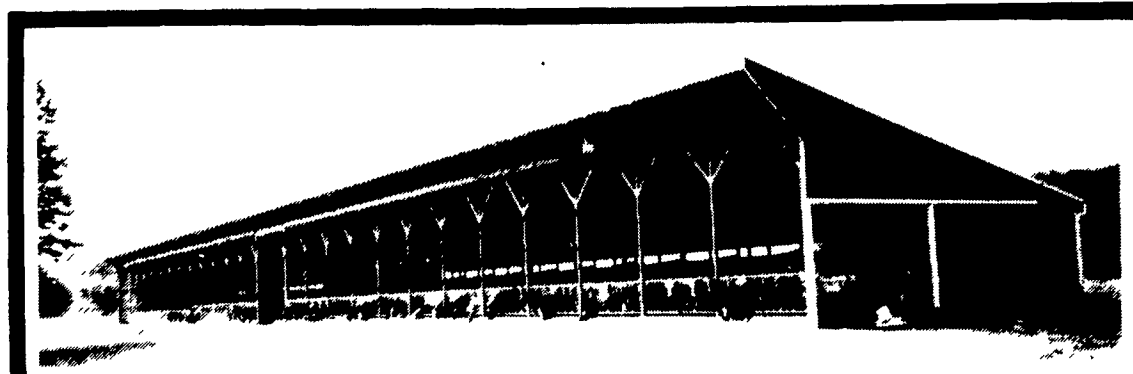
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