

# Misleading labels target of recent FDA campaign

By BETH HARMEN  
Collegian Staff Writer

"Cholesterol-free" claims are the latest targets of the Food and Drug Administration's campaign against deceptive labeling.

With manufacturers making more misleading food content claims "it is difficult for consumers to decipher the difference between fat-free and cholesterol-free," said P.M. Kris-Etherton, associate dean for research and graduate studies in the College of Health and Human Development.

"Consumers are being misled," said Elaine McDonnell, a nutritionist at the University's Nutrition Center. "Something can have no cholesterol and be high in fat."

Until the FDA implements the Nutrition Labeling Act of 1990, foods high in saturated fatty acids, but low in cholesterol, may use the "low-cholesterol" descriptor, McDonnell added.

The NLEA requires mandatory labeling of most processed foods under FDA jurisdiction.

"Consumers do not understand the relationship between cholesterol and

fat," Kris-Etherton said. "They think that a food labeled low-cholesterol is also low in fat and saturated fat."

The descriptor misleads consumers into thinking they can eat a lot of a product, Kris-Etherton said.

"Even the educated consumer has to be careful when looking at labels," McDonnell said. "A product could be cholesterol-free but could raise blood-cholesterol level because of the fat content."

Although FDA has tried to lessen abuses of adjectival nutrient descriptors, some manufacturers continue to make absurd claims, said Christine Lewis, chief of the FDA's Clinical Research Section of the Clinical Nutrition Board.

"Congress was angry when it heard about cholesterol-free bananas," Lewis said. "Bananas are a naturally cholesterol-free food."

Food manufacturers may not claim absence of a nutrient unless it is usually present, it is substituted, or it assists consumers, Lewis said.

Printing the absence of a nutrient even though it never existed in the product could inform uneducated consumers, said John Mil-

ner, head of the University's nutrition department.

"Many people don't realize that animal tissue is the source of cholesterol," Milner said. "Some people don't realize that bananas never had cholesterol, and if you didn't know it, then a (cholesterol-free) label could help you."

Some claims sound more impressive than they are, said Melissa Martilotta, director of the University's Nutrition Clinic.

"A food that is labeled 80 percent fat-free may still be high in fat," she said. "Such claims refer to the percent of the product's weight that is fat." In terms of calories, 40 percent or more may be fat.

The NLEA allows "claims" on food labels, Lewis said, but the FDA must now come up with definitions.

A requirement of the act states that definitions for "free," "low," "light," "reduced," "less" and "high" will be created.

The FDA knows it is difficult to provide understandable and useful information to consumers through simplified descriptive terms on labels, Lewis added.



Collegian Photo/Patti Christian

Foods labeled 'fat-free' and 'cholesterol-free' can be misleading to consumers, said P.M. Kris-Etherton. The labels can lead people to falsely believe they can eat a lot of a product, thinking it is healthy.

## Answer Key

Calculate your score by adding together the numbers corresponding to your answers. Compare your score with the table below.

Under 30  
30 to 45  
45 to 55  
over 55

Strong tendencies toward anorexia nervosa  
Strong tendencies toward bulimia  
Weight conscious, not necessarily with anorexic or bulimic tendencies  
No need for concern

If you scored below 45, it would be wise for you to 1) seek more information about anorexia and bulimia and 2) contact a counselor, pastor or physician to determine what kind of assistance would be most helpful for you. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are potentially life-threatening disorders which can be overcome with the proper support and counsel. The earlier you seek help, the better, although it is never too late to start on the road to recovery.

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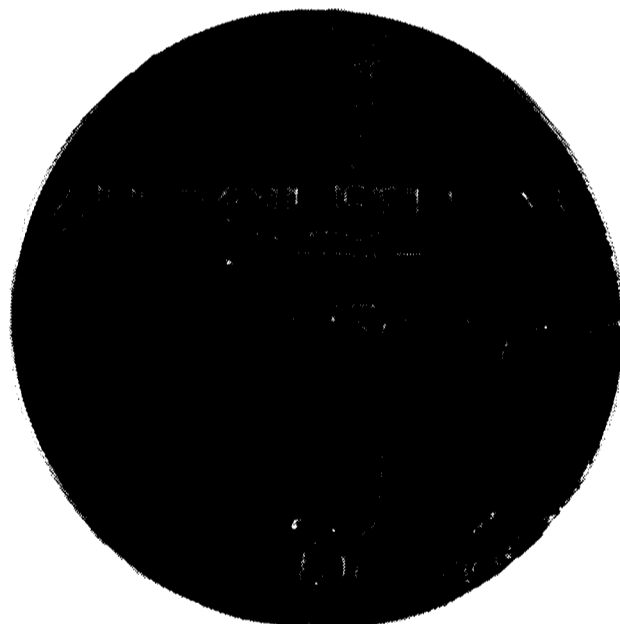
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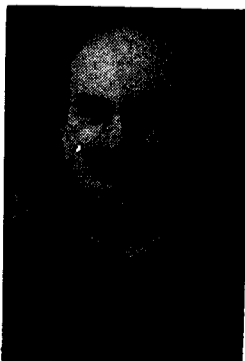
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