

Why Newly Proposed Nutrition Labels are Good* (with emphasis on the asterisk)

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Physician-Chef Points Out the Pros, Cons of 3 Suggested Changes

It's nothing new to the American consumer that food packaging emphasizes only part of a product's health story, and the fact that the nutritional labeling hasn't been overhauled in 20 years hasn't helped, says cardiologist and professional chef Michael S. Fenster, MD.

A proposed update, which could take a year or more to appear on store shelves, is being driven by first lady Michelle Obama, as part of her "Let's Move" campaign.

"Our current nutrition labeling is the same as that implemented in the 1990s, except with the 2006 addition of trans fats information. It's based on nutrition data and eating habits from the 1970s and 1980s," says "Dr. Mike," author of "Eating Well, Living Better: The Grassroots Gourmet Guide to Good Health and Great Food," (www.whatscookingwithdoc.com).

From the perspective of physician and foodie, he analyzes what's good about the first lady's proposed new label, and what could be improved.

• **Good: Calorie counts would be displayed in a bigger, bolder font.** Emphasizing calories allows consumers to think with a helpful "energy in / energy out" baseline. Do I *really*

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need the calories in this product when I could stand to lose a few pounds? That's a reasonably good question to promote.

*****Basing the value of food primarily on calories over-simplifies the evaluation process.**

An energy drink may have zero calories, but it's not better for you than an apple, which may have 100 calories. We cannot overlook

nutrition

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• **Good: Serving sizes would be determined from real data reflecting the portions real people typically eat.** A serving of ice cream is expected to increase from a half cup to a full cup, and a one-serving muffin would be 4 ounces instead of 2 ounces, reflecting the obvious fact that people generally consume the whole scoop of ice cream and the whole muffin.

*****Food producers may simply change the size of pre-packaged portions to skirt the rules.** Industry experts suggest some food manufacturers may just reduce the package size to make their labeling more seductive. When food is parceled into smaller packages, the price per unit usually increases – it becomes more expensive for consumers.

• **Good: New labeling would have listed separately, “added sugar.”** The grams of sugar added, irrespective of whether it's pure cane sugar, corn syrup, honey, sucrose or any other source, would be shown as one listed value. This is good because it starts to get into the quality and composition of the food product, at least indirectly. Many public health experts say “sweet creep” has been a major contributor to obesity, certain cancers, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

*****This will likely be wildly controversial, prompting aggressive lobbying efforts that may have already begun.** The Grocery Manufacturers Association and other industry groups note that the current label already includes the total amount of sugar in the product. The food industry argues that natural sugar and added sugar are chemically identical and that the body doesn't differentiate between the two. However, a significant amount of research shows this is not completely true.

About Michael Fenster, MD

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Michael Fenster, M.D., F.A.C.C., FSCA&I, PEMBA, is a board-certified cardiologist and former Assistant Professor of Medicine at the NEOUCOMM. Dr. Mike is a passionate teacher who has addressed numerous professional organizations and he has participated in many clinical trials. He has published original research featured in peer reviewed scientific and medical journals. He worked his way up to executive chef before medical school and later received his culinary degree in gourmet cooking and catering from Ashworth University; where he graduated with honors. He has combined his culinary and medical expertise to deliver delicious cuisine to delivers us from the disability and diseases of modern civilization through his Grassroots Gourmet™ approach to metabolic health. Dr. Mike's first book "Eating Well, Living Better: The Grassroots Gourmet Guide to Good Health and Great Food," is currently availability. His next book, The Fallacy of the Calorie is slated for release Fall 2014. (www.whatscookingwithdoc.com).