

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 manufacturers 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 Health, 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:

Academy of Culinary Arts, Action Against Allergy, Active Citizens Transform (ACT), Allergy Alliance, Allotments & Gardens Council UK, Alliance for Childhood, Arid Lands Initiative, Association for the Study of Obesity, Association of Teachers and Lecturers, Autism Unravalled, Baby Milk Action, Barnardo's, Biodynamic Agricultural Association, Blood Pressure Association, British Allergy Foundation, British Association for Community Child Health, British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry, British Cardiac Society, British Dental Association, British Dental Health Foundation, British Dental Hygienists' Association, British Dietetic Association, British Ethnic Health Awareness Foundation, British Heart Foundation, British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group, British Hypertension Society, British Institute for Allergy & Environmental Therapy, British Institute for Brain Injured Children, British Medical Association, British Society of Paediatric Dentistry, Cancer Research UK, Caritas-Social Action, Caroline Walker Trust, Centre for Food Policy, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Child Growth Foundation, Child Poverty Action Group, Children's Safety Education Foundation, Children's Society, Children's Trust, Christian Ecology Link, Coeliac UK, Co-operative Group (CWS), Communication Workers Union (CWU), Community Health UK, Community Nutrition Group, Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association (Amicus), Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH), Contact a Family, Coronary Artery Disease Research Association, Coronary Prevention Group, Countryside Alliance, Day Care Trust, Diabetes UK, Digestive Disorders Foundation, Eating Disorders Association, Ecobaby Basics, Ecological Foundation, End Child Poverty, Elm Farm Research Centre, Faculty of Public Health, Family Welfare Association, FareShare, Farmers' Link, FARM, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, Food Additives Campaign Team, Food and Behaviour Research, Food and Chemical Allergy Association, Food and Health Research, Food Commission, Food Justice Campaign, Food Matters, Foundation for Local Food Initiatives, Foundations UK, Forum for the Future, Friends of the Earth, General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Gingerbread, GMB: Britain's General Union, Good Gardeners' Association, Guild of Food Writers, Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome Help (HUSH), Hands Up For..., Health Education Trust, Heart UK, Hempsall Consultancies, Homeopathic Medical Association, Human Scale Education, Hyperactive Children's Support Group, International Society for Food Ecology and Culture, Institute of Health Promotion and Education, Jewish Child's Day, Kids' Cookery School, Kisharon, Land Heritage, Latex Allergy Support Group, Macmillan Cancer Support, Magic Breakfast, McCarrison Society for Nutrition and Health, Medical Practitioners Union, Mental Health Foundation, Migraine Action Association, The Mothers' Union, NASUWT, National Association of School Governors, National Children's Bureau, National Council of Women, National Consumer Council, National Consumer Federation, National Day Nurseries Association, National Family and Parenting Institute, National Federation of Women's Institutes, National Governors' Council, National Heart Forum, National Obesity Forum, National Oral Health Promotion Group, National Union of Teachers, NCH – the children's charity, The National Youth Agency, Netmums, New Economics Foundation, Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, Organix Brands, Parentline Plus, Parent Organisation Ltd, Permaculture Association, Positive Parenting, Pre-school Learning Alliance, Realfood, Royal College of General Practitioners, Royal College of Nursing, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Surgeons, Royal Institute of Public Health, Royal Society for the Promotion of Health, Royal Society of Medicine, Save the Children UK, Scottish Consumer Council, Scottish Countryside Alliance, Scottish Countryside Alliance Educational Trust, Scottish Food Fortnight, Scottish Heart and Arterial Disease Risk Prevention, Shaare Zedek UK (Look Who's Cooking), Small and Family Farms Alliance, Social Equity in Environmental Decisions (SEEDS), Society of Health Education and Promotion Specialists, Soil Association, Soroptimist International of Great Britain, Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, Stirrin' Stuff, Stroke Association, Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, tFX: The UK campaign against trans fats in food, TOAST (The Obesity Awareness & Solutions Trust), Trading Standards Institute, UK Public Health Association, UNISON, Vega Research, Vegetarian and Vegan Foundation, Veggies Catering Campaign, Viva!, Weight Concern, Welsh Consumer Council, Welsh Food Alliance, Woodcraft Folk, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, World Cancer Research Fund, Young Minds Trust.

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