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## FOOD LABELLING: FORTHCOMING EU REGULATION AND UK GUIDELINES

**Food labels are our main means of understanding what our food actually contains; which is really important in enabling us to make more informed and potentially healthier consumer choices. In order to improve the standard of food labelling consistently across Europe, the EU Provision of Food Information for Consumers Regulation<sup>1</sup> was adopted in 2011, with most of these legal requirements having become effective on 13th December 2014.**

This article examines the implication of this Regulation and, in particular, the 'nutritional declaration' aspect which will become mandatory for the majority of food labels from 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

This Regulation sets out three fundamental requirements for food labelling:<sup>1</sup>

1. Food information shall not be misleading.
2. Food information shall be accurate, clear and easy to understand.
3. Food information shall not suggest that the food prevents, treats or cures a human disease.

### MANDATORY INFORMATION FOR FOOD LABELS: (see example, figure 1 overleaf)

- a. The name of the food
- b. The list of ingredients (generally listed in descending order of weight)
- c. Allergy information
- d. The quantity of certain ingredients or categories of ingredients
- e. The net quantity of the food
- f. The 'best before' or the 'use by' date
- g. Any special storage conditions and/or conditions of use
- h. The name or business name and address of the food business operator
- i. The country of origin or 'place of provenance' (i.e. when production involves more than one country, this is the country where the primary ingredient comes from, or where the product underwent its last important stage of manufacturing)

- j. Instructions for use (where appropriate)
- k. The alcoholic strength documented as 'alcohol' or 'alc' followed by the '% vol' (where beverages contain more than 1.2% by volume of alcohol)
- l. A nutrition declaration

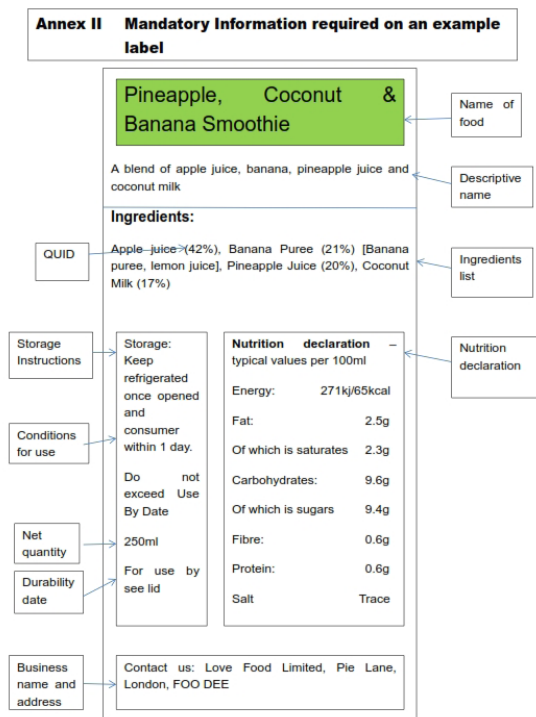
*Note: Exemptions apply to specific types of glass bottles (only points (a), (c), (e), (f) and (l) are mandatory) and containers where the largest surface area is <10cm<sup>2</sup> (only points (a), (c), (e) and (f) are mandatory); however the list of ingredients must be available via other means or upon request. Additional mandatory labelling requirements exist related to products such as: frozen meat or fish, products containing sweeteners, products with a high caffeine content, dried milk products, products in vending machines and alcoholic drinks.*

### ALLERGEN LABELLING

(see example, figure 2 overleaf)

Since 13<sup>th</sup> December 2014, all products which contain any of the allergenic substances listed below are legally required to clearly specify these in the ingredients list and to highlight these through a typeset distinguished by font, style or colour.<sup>1</sup> In cases where there is no ingredients list included, the label must state 'contains' followed by the allergens in question; unless the name of the product contains the allergen.

Figure 1: Example mandatory information



QUID: Quantitative Ingredient Declarations  
source: [www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fir-guidance2014.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fir-guidance2014.pdf)

Figure 2: Example allergy information

**INGREDIENTS**

Sunflower oil, water, white wine vinegar, sugar, pasteurised free range **egg** yolk, Parmigiano Reggiano cheese (4%) (**milk**), salt, extra virgin olive oil (1%), concentrated lemon juice, dried onion, Worcester sauce, garlic purée, black pepper, onion purée, anchovy paste, stabiliser xanthan gum, citric acid  
*Worcester sauce* contains water, spirit vinegar, **barley** malt vinegar, sugar, molasses, salt, onion powder, garlic powder, tamarind extract, ginger powder, chilli powder  
*Anchovy paste* contains anchovy (**fish**), salt, olive oil, spirit vinegar

**ALLERGENS**

For allergens see ingredients in **bold**

source: [www.reading.ac.uk/foodlaw/label/allergens-guidance-brc-1.pdf](http://www.reading.ac.uk/foodlaw/label/allergens-guidance-brc-1.pdf)

**MANDATORY NUTRITIONAL DECLARATION'**

From 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016 a 'nutrition declaration' (also referred to as 'back of pack' nutritional information) must be present on all food labels.<sup>1</sup> Prior to this date (i.e. between 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016) companies may include a voluntary nutritional declaration which must also comply with the regulation:

- Allergenic substances legally required to be clearly specified in the ingredients list**
- Cereals containing gluten - wheat, oats, barley, rye, spelt, kamut or their hybridised strains
  - Crustaceans
  - Celery
  - Eggs
  - Mustard
  - Fish
  - Sesame seeds
  - Peanuts
  - Molluscs
  - Nuts - almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecan nuts, Brazil nuts, pistachio nuts, macadamia nuts & Queensland nuts
  - Sulphur dioxide and sulphites at concentrations of more than 10mg/kg or 10mg/litre
  - Soybeans
  - Lupin
  - Milk

- a. The energy value declared in both kJ and kcal.
- b. The amounts of fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt declared in grams (although it may be stated if the salt content is due to naturally occurring sodium present in the product).

The nutritional content values are legally required to be given per 100g or 100ml; but in addition to this, the nutritional content may also be given:

- Per portion or per consumption unit, or
- As a percentage per 100g or 100ml (or per portion or consumption unit) in relation to the 'reference intake of an average adult (8,400kJ/2,000kcal)' if this is specifically stated. Note: the term 'Reference Intake' (RI) is to replace 'Guideline Daily Amounts' (GDAs).<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3: Example: 'toffee popcorn'

Nutrition				
Typical values	100g contains	per 25g	% RI*	RI* for an average adult
Energy	1780kJ 420kcal	445kJ 105kcal	5%	8400kJ 2000kcal
Fat	9.0g	2.3g	3%	70g
of which saturates	1.9g	0.5g	3%	20g
Carbohydrate	81.3g	20.3g		
of which sugars	66.1g	16.5g	18%	90g
Protein	2.1g	0.5g		
Salt	1.4g	0.3g	5%	6g

source: [www.bhf.org.uk/publications/healthy-eating-and-drinking/this-label-could-change-your-life](http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/healthy-eating-and-drinking/this-label-could-change-your-life)

Food manufacturers may also decide to include some or all of these optional additions to the 'back of pack' nutritional declaration:

- monounsaturates
- polyunsaturates
- polyols
- starch
- fibre
- Specific vitamins or minerals when present in 'significant amounts' based on Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs)

The set order of nutrients for the mandatory nutritional declaration; including the optional additional nutrients and the specified units of measurement is shown in figure 4.

Exemptions from the mandatory nutritional declaration:<sup>1</sup>

1. Alcoholic drinks containing >1.2% alcohol strength (where it is chosen to include a nutritional declaration it may be limited to the energy value or the energy value with the amounts of fat, saturates, sugars, and

Figure 4: Set order of nutrients for the mandatory nutritional declaration

Energy	kJ/kcal
Fat	g
of which	
- saturates	g
- mono-unsaturates	g
- polyunsaturates	g
Carbohydrate	g
of which	
- sugars	g
- polyols	g
- starch	g
Fibre	g
Protein	g
Salt	g
Vitamins and minerals	The units specified in point 1 of Part A of Annex XIII

salt. Alternatively, these values may be given on a 'per portion/per consumption' unit basis only, rather than per 100g or per 100ml

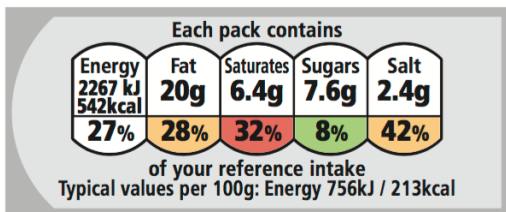
2. Unprocessed products made of a single ingredient; or where the only processing has been maturing that ingredient
3. Bottled water including those where the only added ingredients are flavourings and/or carbon dioxide
4. Herbs/spices
5. Salt/salt substitutes
6. Table top sweeteners
7. Certain coffee and chicory extracts, whole or milled coffee beans (including decaffeinated coffee beans)
8. Herbal and fruit infusions, tea, decaffeinated tea
9. Fermented vinegars/vinegar substitutes
10. Flavourings, food additives, processing aids, food enzymes
11. Gelatine, jam setting compounds
12. Yeast
13. Chewing-gums
14. Food labels where the largest surface area is <25cm<sup>2</sup>
15. Food supplied in small quantities to local retailers directly from the manufacturer (e.g. handcrafted food)

**'PRINCIPLE FIELD OF VISION' OR 'FRONT OF PACKAGE' LABELLING**

This refers to all surfaces that can be read from one specific viewing point; but for ease, I will refer to this as 'front of pack' (FoP) labelling. Roughly 80% of processed foods contain some form of FoP labelling.<sup>3</sup> As long as the food label contains the mandatory nutrition declaration (i.e. the 'back of pack' label), the following information can be repeated on the FoP on a voluntary basis:<sup>1</sup>

- a. The energy value, or
- b. The energy value and the amounts of fat, saturates, sugars, and salt. In this case, the values given for the nutrients except for energy may be given per portion or per consumption unit only. However, the energy content must be provided per 100g or 100ml as well as per portion or per consumption unit.

Figure 5: Example 'Front of Package' labelling



Source: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/300886/2902158\\_FoP\\_Nutrition\\_2014.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300886/2902158_FoP_Nutrition_2014.pdf)

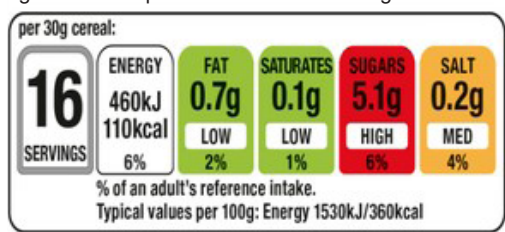
**STANDARDISATION OF FOP LABELLING**

Despite the finding from the Food Standard Authority in 2009 that 'standardising to just one label format would enhance use and comprehension of front of package labels',<sup>4</sup> the new nutritional declaration guidelines don't specify the exact format which should be used for voluntary FoP labelling. Therefore, in June 2013, as a result of a joint consultation held in January 2013 which included input from the main food production stakeholders in the UK,<sup>3</sup> a guide was produced outlining the information which should be included on a FoP label:<sup>2</sup>

- The energy value in kJ and kcal per 100g/100ml and in a specified portion of the product.
- The amounts of: fat, saturated fat, total sugars and salt provided in grams in relation to a specified portion of the product.

- Portion size expressed in a way which is easily recognisable by, and useful to the consumer, e.g. ¼ of a pie or 1 burger.
- % Reference Intake (RI) based on the amount of each nutrient and energy value in a portion of the food.
- Colour coding of the nutrient content of the food (with an option to include the descriptors 'High', 'Medium' or 'Low' along with the respective colours red, amber or green).

Figure 6: Example standard FoP labelling



source: <http://heartresearch.org.uk/heart/green-light-food-labelling>

**HOW USEFUL DO CONSUMERS FIND FOP FOOD LABELS?**

In 2009, the Food Standards Agency released a report on the 'Comprehension and Use of UK Nutrition Signpost Labelling Schemes'.<sup>4</sup> This included a combination of qualitative research (accompanied shops and shopping bag audits) and quantitative research (surveys and interviews, whereby the main survey consisted of 2,932 consumers), which found that a food label which combined text (i.e. 'high', 'medium' and 'low'), traffic light colours and %RI was the most user-friendly and best-liked labelling scheme.

This study also indicated that older adults (i.e. those over 65), people with lower levels of education, those from a lower social demographic and certain minority ethnic groups were more likely to have difficulty interpreting FoP labels. Consumers who were shopping for children, those with a medical condition (or a family history of a medical condition), or those trying to lose weight, were found to be more likely to read FoP labels. The main medical conditions identified as having an effect on use of FoP labels were: diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia and coeliac disease. It was found that each group tended to

look at the most relevant nutrients related to their condition; e.g. consumers with diabetes were most likely to check the sugar content.

### HEALTH CLAIMS

Although the regulation states that ‘Food information shall not suggest that the food prevents, treats or cures a human disease’, there are some legal exemptions which exist related to foods with particular nutritional uses, such as infant formula. However, if a food supplement claims to have a medicinal effect, it must be licensed under medicines legislation (MHRA).<sup>5</sup>

Specific nutritional claims which are permitted for use with food products must comply with EU regulations No 1924/2006<sup>6</sup> and No 1047/2012.<sup>7</sup>

For example, a food can claim to be ‘low fat’ if it contains no more than 3.0g of fat per 100g for solids or 1.5g of fat per 100ml for liquid; or a food can be marketed as ‘high fibre’ if it contains at least 6.0g of fibre per 100g or at least 3.0g of fibre per 100kcal.<sup>6,7</sup> These regulations also set the criteria for the reference ranges used for the traffic light labelling scheme (not including fibre).

Figure 7: Example BHF Food Label Decoder



source: [www.bhf.org.uk/publications/healthy-eating-and-drinking/this-label-could-change-your-life](http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/healthy-eating-and-drinking/this-label-could-change-your-life).



### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The ‘EU Provision of Food Information for Consumers Regulation’ sets out the legal requirements which food manufacturers must abide by in relation to food labelling. This includes specific guidance on nutritional factors such as allergen information; and from 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016, it will be mandatory for the majority of food labels to include a specific ‘nutritional declaration’ which includes: the energy content declared in both kJ and kcal and the amounts of fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt declared per 100g or per 100ml.

As an addition to this mandatory nutritional declaration, food products may also contain a FoP label which includes: the energy value in kJ and kcal per 100g or 100ml and in a specified portion of the product; the amounts of fat, saturated fat, total sugars and salt in relation to a specific portion of the product, the % RI of each nutrient and energy value per portion of the product and traffic light colour coding.

The forthcoming nutritional declaration requirements will hopefully improve the quality, consistency and clarity of food labels to help our patients and the general public make more informed food choices.

### References

- 1 Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32011R1169>)
- 2 Guide to creating a FoP nutrition label for pre-packed products sold through retail outlets ([www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/300886/2902158\\_FoP\\_Nutrition\\_2014.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300886/2902158_FoP_Nutrition_2014.pdf))
- 3 FoP Nutrition Labelling: Joint Response to Consultation ([www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/216997/response-nutrition-labelling-consultation.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216997/response-nutrition-labelling-consultation.pdf))
- 4 Comprehension and use of UK nutrition signpost labelling schemes (<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131104005023/http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/pmpreport.pdf>)
- 5 Summary information on legislation relating to the sale of food supplements ([www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/204303/Supplements\\_Summary\\_Jan\\_2012\\_DH\\_FINAL.doc.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/204303/Supplements_Summary_Jan_2012_DH_FINAL.doc.pdf))
- 6 Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32006R1924>)
- 7 Regulation (EU) No 1047/2012 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012R1047>)
- 8 Food Labelling in the UK: A Guide to the Legal Requirements ([www.reading.ac.uk/foodlaw/label/index2.htm](http://www.reading.ac.uk/foodlaw/label/index2.htm))