



fighting heart disease
and stroke
european heart network



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Call for urgent adoption of EU-wide nutrient profiles for nutrition and health claims

Today three health and consumer organisations together with five food companies call for the urgent adoption of nutrient profiles in the context of the EU regulation on nutrition and health claims made on foods (Regulation EC 1924/2006). The nutrient profiles should have been proposed by the European Commission in January 2009 – no proposal has been forthcoming as of May 2017.

Why are nutrient profiles important?

Without nutrient profiles, nutrition and health claims can be put on any food and non-alcoholic product and, indeed, can be found on approximately 30% of packaged products sold in the EU.ⁱ

Health and nutrition claims may help consumers identify healthier products if they are used responsibly.^{ii,iii,iv}

However they also have considerable potential to mislead.^v For example, consumers may attribute excessive health benefits to consuming a food with a claim – ‘magic bullet’ effect.^{vi,vii} They may incorrectly perceive a product with a claim more positively than a similar product without a claim (positivity bias). Finally they may incorrectly ascribe to a product positive attributes unrelated to the claim – ‘health halo’ effect.^{viii}

For all these reasons the presence of claims may lead consumers to overestimate the “healthfulness” of products bearing claims – and consequently to overconsume them.

→ ***Impact on cardiovascular health***

Overconsumption of foods that are not healthy is a problem in the EU because it faces major challenges from diet-related chronic diseases and obesity. For example heart disease and stroke (and other cardiovascular conditions) account for close to 40% of all deaths in the EU – and almost 49 million people live with cardiovascular diseases. WHO estimates that 80% of these diseases can be avoided by controlling the main risk factors: tobacco, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.^{ix}

Cardiovascular diseases cost the EU economy €210 billion a year – of which about 50% is related to productivity loss (from premature death and people living with the diseases) and

the opportunity cost of informal care. Dietary risks contribute significantly to heart disease and stroke.^x

→ ***Impact on food re-formulation***

Considering that health and nutrition claims are effective means of marketing products to consumers, the setting of nutrient profiles in the context of the EU nutrition and health claims regulation would be a major boost for the implementation of the EU reformulation agenda, which is part of the EU policy drive to address major diet-related chronic diseases and obesity.^{xi} This is because some manufacturers would need to reduce levels of fat/salt/sugar in order to be able to put a claim on their products.

ⁱ Hieke, S.; Kuljanic, N.; Pravst, I.; Miklavc, K.; Kaur, A.; Brown, K.A.; Egan, B.M.; Pfeifer, K.; Gracia, A.; Rayner, M. Prevalence of Nutrition and Health-Related Claims on Pre-Packaged Foods: A Five-Country Study in Europe. *Nutrients* 2016, 8, 137

ⁱⁱ Thorndike A, Sonnenberg L, Riis J, Barraclough S, Levy DE. A 2-phase labeling and choice architecture intervention to improve healthy food and beverage choices. *Am J Public Health* 2012; 102: 527–533

ⁱⁱⁱ Hawley K, Roberto C, Bragg M, Liu P, Schwartz M, Brownell K. The science on front-of-package food labels. *Public Health Nutr* 2013; 16: 430–439

^{iv} Hawkes C (2004) Nutrition labels and health claims. World Health Organization. URL: <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42964/1/9241591714.pdf>

^v Mariotti F, Kalonji E, Huneau JF, Margaritis I. Potential pitfalls of health claims from a public health nutrition perspective. *Nutr Rev* 2010; 68: 624–638

^{vi} Roe, B., Levy, A., & Derby, B. (1999). The Impact of Health Claims on Consumer Search and Product Evaluation Outcomes: Results from FDA Experimental Data. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 18(1), 89-105

^{vii} Williams P. Consumer understanding and use of health claims for foods. *Nutr Rev*. 2005 Jul;63(7):256-64

^{viii} Chandon, P., Wansink, B. (2007). The Biasing Health Halos of Fast-Food Restaurant Health Claims: Lower Calorie Estimates and Higher Side-Dish Consumption Intentions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(3), 301-314. doi:10.1086/51949

^{ix} <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/cardiovascular-diseases>

^x Wilkins E, Wilson L, Wickramasinghe K, Bhatnagar P, Leal J, Luengo-Fernandez R, Burns R, Rayner M, Townsend N (2017). [European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2017](#). European Heart Network, Brussels

^{xi} Council conclusions on food product improvement. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/06/17-epsco-conclusions-food-product-improvement/>