

9 Food Label Lies

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February 25 2010 | 66,250 views

The healthiest food often has the least marketing muscle behind it. The Center for Science in the Public Interest recently published a comprehensive report on the subject, a persuasive indictment called "[Food Labeling Chaos](#)."

Here are nine of the most common ways food labels lie, so you can prepare before your next trip to the grocery store.

“Made With Whole Grains”

Unbleached wheat flour is still the main ingredient; whole wheat flour is further down on the list, indicating that the product contains relatively little. One truth -- the presence of whole grains -- masks another; that whole grains make up an insignificant portion of the food.

Another factor to keep in mind is the presence of potassium bromate, a dough conditioner found in commercial bakery products and some flours, which is a major, but hidden cause of thyroid dysfunction. This ingredient may be used even in whole grain breads. For more information, please review this previous [article](#).

Ingredients

Even if the first ingredient listed isn't sugar, the product may contain more sugar than anything else. How is it possible? Just add up all the sugars that go by different names, such as sugar, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup and white grape juice concentrate.

Serving Size

There are 2.5 official servings in a 20 ounce soda bottles, meaning that 100 calories per "serving" is really 240 calories per bottle.

Omega 3

Everyone knows omega-3 fats are healthy, but that doesn't mean every product emblazoned with the word is a healthy source of it. The FDA allows certain foods that are rich in two of the omega-3 fats to advertise that they can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, but only if they're also low in saturated fats or other risk factors. Which is why some unhealthy foods use a bit of marketing misdirection: the packaging has the word "omega-3," but nothing specifically about heart health.

“Made With Real Fruit”

Usually the only thing approximating fruit is concentrate (sugar). If you want real fruit, buy real fruit. If you want candy, buy candy.

“0 Trans Fat”

Many reformulated foods are basically just as bad, but they scream one truth: "0 trans fats!" to obscure another: "still bad for your heart!"

“Free Range Eggs”

This means chickens must be granted the luxury of exactly five minutes of "access" to the outdoors every day. Those eggs you buy *may* have been raised ethically, with room enough for hens to roam the yard. But there's no guarantee in the "free range" label.

Fiber

The fibers advertised in many foods are mainly "purified powders" called inulin, polydextrose and maltodextrin. These "isolated" unnatural fibers are unlikely to lower blood cholesterol or blood sugar, as other fibers can.

Tastes Like Medicine!

The FDA allows food manufacturers to make certain pre-approved "qualified health claims" about the health benefits of nutrients in food. But marketers have stretched this inch into a long mile. For instance, food makers can't say that their product "helps reduce the risk of heart disease" without FDA approval, so they say that it "helps maintain a healthy heart."

That's why several public health groups, including the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society, have voiced concern about this trend.

Sources:

» [The Daily Green February 1, 2010](#)

Dr. Mercola's Comments:

It's unfortunate that food labels, which are ideally designed to help you make educated purchasing decisions, have deteriorated over time into little more than deceptive advertising.

There are a large variety of ways for food manufacturers to bend the truth on their labels, and some go as far as being outright fraudulent. The report, "[Food Labeling Chaos](#)," created by the

Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), outlines the many problems consumers now face when reading food labels. “

Chaos” is indeed the appropriate word, and unfortunately, there’s too much to cover in this one article. However, following are a few basics that you need to beware of that can help get you started.

Know What the FDA Does, and Does Not Do, in Terms of Checking Labels

It’s important to realize that while the FDA does check food labels, they only check to see whether or not the Nutrition Facts panel is present, rather than whether or not it is true and accurate.

They do not look for deceptive "0 trans fat" claims and misleading "made with real fruit" statements. So unfortunately, you’re on your own in this regard, and it’s up to you to assume total responsibility for the choices you make.

The truth is that the FDA estimates that roughly one out of every 10 food product labels contain inaccuracies. Additionally, you need to be aware of the fact that a food label must be more than 20 percent off in order for it to violate federal law, and government food labs have a 10 percent margin of error.

This means that an item labeled as having 400 calories *can legally* have up to 480 calories, and the 10 percent margin of error can bring it up to over 500.

But that’s not all you need to take into account when checking food labels.

Can You Trust That the Ingredients are What They Say They are?

You need to realize that some foods, particularly those making low-fat, low-carb or no-sugar claims, can contain drastically different nutrients than are listed on the label, and food products that say they contain milk, fruit or vegetables may not contain the real McCoy at all.

For example, some blueberry muffins do not contain actual blueberries, but rather artificial blueberry-flavored bits. Other products that list milk on their label may actually contain non-fat powdered milk, palm oil, sugar and additives, instead – the chemical “equivalent” of milk.

There is also the potentially daunting task of deciphering what certain ingredients really are. For instance, if you were trying to avoid corn (which is genetically modified in most cases these days), you would have to avoid not only anything listed as “corn,” but also:

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Malt | Baking powder |
| Malt extract and syrup | Monosodium glutamate (MSG) |

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Sorbitol | Maltodextrin |
| Food starch | Starch |
| Dextrin | Confectioner's sugar |
| Fructose and fructose syrup | |

All of these items could potentially be made from corn, but unless you are specifically aware of what to look for it would be easy to overlook these items when looking for corn on an ingredient label.

What's the Solution?

There are no easy answers when it comes to deciphering food labels, but there are simple strategies that can help ensure you know exactly what you're eating, such as:

- Avoid eating packaged or processed foods
- Eat whole foods
- Prepare your food at home

If you are used to relying on processed foods then this may sound like a tall order. After all, although 80 percent of Americans say they read food labels, [44 percent will still choose to buy a food](#) that they know is bad for them!

It really comes down to a change in mindset – choosing to eat “real” food that has been minimally processed and tampered with.

Choosing whole foods like fresh produce, [organic meat](#) and [eggs](#) and other real food is the way you were born to eat, and once you start eating this way it will seem only natural to you.

If you're unsure of where or how to start, I suggest you read my book [Take Control of Your Health](#) for a comprehensive, healthy eating program that is filled with only real, natural foods.

You can also check out my free online [nutrition plan](#) for an overview to get you going in the meantime.

While it's true that eating whole foods will require a little more time, if you are interested in knowing exactly what you are putting into your body and changing your health for the better, it is well worth the effort – and it's really your one and only option.

For more easy-to-use guidelines for how to make healthy shopping easier, please review my previous article, [How to Shop for the Right Food in Your Regular Grocery Store in 10 Easy Steps](#).

Last But Not Least – What You Need to Know about the Organic Food Label

Eating fresh, whole foods ideally means selecting locally-grown organic foods. And that brings up the point of the organic food label, which has also been watered down to the point of being nearly useless.



What you need to know is that there is only one organic label out there that means anything as far as organic food is concerned: the USDA Certified Organic label.

The [USDA Organic seal](#) is currently your BEST assurance of organic food quality. Farmers and growers of organic produce bearing the USDA seal have to meet the strictest standards of any organic label.

(As a side note, it's also the international gold standard for personal care products that contain organic agricultural ingredients, because the ingredients in USDA certified beauty products are certified organic for *food*, adhering to much stricter standards as they are intended specifically for human consumption.

So I'm pleased to tell you that [my certified organic skincare](#) line is one of only five companies in the world to achieve USDA Organic certification.

The USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) regulates the standards for any farm, wild crop harvesting, or handling operation that wants to sell an agricultural product as organically produced. And the stringent [labeling requirements of the NOP](#) apply to all raw, fresh products, and processed products that contain organic agricultural ingredients.

In order [to qualify as organic](#), a product must be grown and processed using organic farming methods that recycle resources and promote biodiversity. Crops must be grown without synthetic pesticides, bioengineered genes, petroleum-based fertilizers, or sewage sludge-based fertilizers.

Organic livestock must have access to the outdoors and cannot be given antibiotics or growth hormones.

- Products labeled "100 percent organic" must contain only organically produced materials
- Products labeled simply "organic" must contain at least 95 percent organic ingredients, whereas
- The label "made with organic ingredients" can contain anywhere between 70 to 95 percent organic ingredients

It's good to know that organic products carrying the USDA Organic label cannot be irradiated, are not allowed to contain preservatives or flavor enhancing chemicals, nor can they contain traces of heavy metals or other contaminants in excess of [tolerances set by the FDA](#).

The pesticide residue level also cannot be higher than 5 percent of the maximum [EPA pesticide tolerance](#). (For the complete *National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances* under the USDA organic label, see this [link](#).)

So remember, if you see anything that says it's "organic," it must specify "USDA Certified Organic" in order to be meaningful.

Related Links:

- » [How to Shop for the Right Food in Your Regular Grocery Store in 10 Easy Steps](#)
- » [How to Find Hidden MSG on Food Labels](#)
- » ["Nutrition Facts" are Inaccurate](#)

Reference website: <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2010/02/25/9-food-label-lies.aspx>