

Trade guidelines on serving size of prepackaged food for nutrition labelling

Purpose

Under the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W), nutrition labelling is required for all prepackaged food unless otherwise exempted. On the nutrition label, information on energy and nutrient contents can be presented as per 100g/mL, per package, or per serving. “Per serving” presentation conveys useful information on nutrient intake to consumers. In the absence of standard serving sizes locally, serving sizes for some products of the same type may vary considerably, causing consumer’s confusion. To promote good practice, this set of guidelines aims at encouraging and assisting the trade to provide information on the serving size of prepackaged food products for the purpose of nutrition labelling.

Background

2. Providing nutrition information on food labels is an important public health tool to promote a balanced diet as food label is an important communication channel whereby consumers can obtain specific information on individual food products.

3. The Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment: Requirements for Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claim) Regulation 2008 (“the Amendment Regulation”) has entered into force in July 2010. The Amendment Regulation introduces a Nutrition Labelling Scheme which requires all prepackaged food to declare the content of energy and seven specified nutrients (namely protein, carbohydrates, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and sugars) on nutrition labels, unless otherwise exempted.

4. According to the Amendment Regulation, when declaring the values of energy and nutrients that are mandatorily required, these values can be expressed as-

- per 100 g (or 100 mL) of food;
- per package (if the package contains only a single serving); or

- per serving (provided that the number of servings and the serving size (in gram or milliliter) are specified on the package).

5. A “serving” refers to the amount of product people usually eat on one occasion. In the Amendment Regulation, there is no specific requirement for the size of each “serving” for different prepackaged food. However, as a general rule, all information provided on prepackaged food must be factual and not misleading

Local situation

6. The trade has liberty to establish the serving size for different prepackaged food products for the purpose of nutrition labelling. However, the size of “one serving” of different food products of the same type may vary and the serving size declared on the products may not reflect the actual amount most consumers would usually consume on one occasion. Some consumers may find the information provided confusing or misleading. Therefore, guidelines on serving size would be useful to assist the trade in preparing nutrition labels, as well as to facilitate consumers better understand and utilise the information provided. This set of guidelines was developed by the Centre of Food Safety, in collaboration with members of the trade.

Overseas situation

7. Declaration of nutrients content per serving of food is mandatorily required in some countries such as USA, Canada, where traders must follow regulations or guidelines on the determination of serving size of prepackaged food. In Australia, although nutrients content must be declared per serving of food (along with declaration per 100g of food), the serving sizes used in nutrition labels are not prescribed, but they should reflect a realistic portion of the food that a person might normally consume. In mainland China, traders may choose to declare nutrient content on “per serving” basis. Traders may define a “serving” basing on the characteristics of their products, provided that the actual amount of food (in terms of gram or milliliter) is declared. For example, “one package”, “one bag”, “one can”, “one bottle”, “one piece” may be referred as “one serving”.

Recommendation on serving size determination

8. Careful consideration should be made when deciding the serving size of prepackaged food products. As a general principle, each “serving” should reflect the amount of product people usually eat on one occasion. It is recommended that the following approach could be followed when determining the serving size of prepackaged food for the purpose of nutrition labelling-

- (i) For products in packing designed for single consumption occasion, the size of the entire pack could be considered as one serving. Examples of such products are individually packed ice-cream bars, soft drinks packed in cans which cannot be resealed, cup noodles, etc.



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- (ii) If the product in the package is not intended for consumption on a single occasion,
 - (a) If there are clearly pre-portioned units in the package, and each recognizable unit reflects the reasonable amount that one would

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usually consume on a single occasion, it could be considered as one serving.

Examples of such products are pre-sliced bread and cake, pre-sliced cheese, dried egg noodles, etc.





(b) If the product is not pre-portioned, but the product is designed to be consumed by a set number of people, the serving size should make reference to the pack proportion.

For example, for a pack of dried pasta which is intended to serve 2 people, “one serving” should refer to the weight of one half of the package.

For such cases, it is also recommended to provide clear serving instruction (e.g., “serves 4”) on the product package.





- (c) For other products, the trade may determine the serving sizes of their products after careful consideration of factors including the dietary habit of the population, dietary recommendations, product's characteristics and history of use, as well as manufacturing constraints.



9. It is recommended that traders could develop and agree on reference serving size for different types of products, particularly for scenario (ii)(c) mentioned in the above paragraph, as well as for some product types such as beverage and frozen confections which traders may have already had certain industrial standard or common consensus on the serving sizes. When local standards or consensus are available, traders should note and adhere to these local common practices whenever possible to maintain industrial standard and to facilitate consumer understanding.

10. When determining the serving size of prepackaged food products, traders may also make reference to overseas guidelines on serving size for the purpose of nutrition labelling. However, it should note that the dietary habit of people in Hong Kong and overseas countries may not be the same. Therefore, these overseas guidelines could only be considered as a general reference.

■ US:

- Reference amounts which are used for determining serving sizes:

<http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=563f0b6235da3f4c7912a64cbceec305&rgn=div8&view=text&node=21:2.0.1.1.2.1.1.8&idno=21>

■ Canada:

- Regulation on serving size:

http://www.laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/C.R.C.-c.870/page-1.html#anchorbo-ga:l_B-gb:s_B_01_001

- Guideline on serving size:

http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeti/guide/ch6e.shtml#a6_2

■ Confederation of the food and drink industries of the EU (CIAA)

- Portion Sizes For the Purposes of Nutrition Labelling- CIAA Proposed Approach:

http://gda.ciaa.eu/custom_documents/brochures/CIAA_portions_sizes_2010.pdf

- Portion size and rationale of CIAA members (including trade associations for soup, bakery, cereal, meat, savoury snack, ice-cream, margarine, pasta products and non-alcoholic beverages):

http://gda.ciaa.eu/asp2/gdas_portions_rationale.asp?doc_id=2
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Food product examples with corresponding serving size or reference amount are summarized in Table 1 for reference.

Table 1 Examples of serving size / reference amount established overseas

Product type	US reference amount	Canada serving size	EU portion size
Beverages	240 mL	250-375 mL	250 mL
Dried pasta	55 g	45-100 g	80-100 g
Snack	30 g	40-60 g	30 g
Ice-cream	1/2 cup	60-250 mL	100 mL (50 g)

11. For products which were not specially labelled for the Hong Kong market, if the serving size on the nutrition label was determined in accordance with the regulation or guidelines of their country of origin, it would be generally considered acceptable.

12. While the trade has liberty to present nutrition information as per 100g/mL, per package, or per serving of product, it is important to ensure such information is clear to consumers. As reflected in the feedback of consumers, it is preferable to provide information of energy and nutrients as per 100g/mL to facilitate product comparison, especially for those products of which appropriate serving size is difficult to be determined.

Other recommendations on serving size expression

13. Traders are also strongly encouraged to note the consistency of the information on weight/count declaration on the food label and the expression of reference amount of food (i.e., per 100g/ml, per serving or per package) on the nutrition label.

14. For some products, the quantity of food declared on the package is based on the product count instead of product weight. However, the nutrition label declaration is based on “per 100g” only. Hence, consumers are not able to calculate the energy and nutrient content of each piece/ each package of the product. Such practice is not encouraged and

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traders are recommended to provide information on product weight or volume on their prepackaged products. Otherwise, nutrition information for “per serving” of product on the package, along with information on serving size and number of servings, may be declared. Although such presentation is voluntary, it is strongly recommended to follow such a practice as it would facilitate consumers using nutrition label to make food choices and enhance consumers’ satisfaction on the product.

Centre for Food Safety
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