Consumer Perspective: Salt and sugar in food

Gilly Wong
Chief Executive

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If you ask an average consumer, they will say...

I know too much salt, sugar and fat is bad for my health
If you drill them more, the answers are...

What’s my nutrition needs? Oh...don’t know.

Heard of nutrition labels, but hardly read it.

Nutrition label is so hard to read.

Have I followed nutrition labels to control my diet? Seldom.
Reading of food label information

- Read expiry date (57.9%), name of food (38.5%), brand (37.8%) and nutrition label (33.6%)
- Not often read - nutrition claims, storage instruction, info of manufacturer, count, weight or volume

Nutrition Labelling

- 70% of population heard of it, but less for senior citizens
- Only 2.6% were able to name all the “1+7” items correctly
- 1/3 were unable to name even 1 out of the 8 items
- 28.2% read nutrition labels when they purchased prepackaged foods for the first time
- 42.4% especially the elderly rarely or never read nutrition labels
2011 Audit Report on Food Labelling (2)

Nutrition Labelling

• Key reasons:
  – No time (30.3%)
  – Nutrition was not my concerns (24.3%)
  – Font size too small (16% / 33.3% for seniors)
  – Did not know how to read the labels (11.9% / 28.6% for seniors)

• For those read, 31.1% believed it helps develop healthy diet

• 63.7% found not always useful because cannot relate the information to daily intake and difficult to understand

部分字體大小欠佳的例子:

- 「四洲甘大滋餅乾條」（#6）的營養標籤英文字母高度只有 0.48 毫米，中文字只有 0.91 毫米。

- 「EDO 餅（原味）」（#10）的包裝紙表面積大於 400 平方厘米，營養資料以中英文標示，但其最大中文字高度只為 1.6 毫米，小於《業界指引》的建議（1.8 毫米）。該樣本的包裝盒有足夠空間提供更大的營養標籤。
CFS Survey on Public Knowledge, Attitude and Practice regarding Nutrition Labelling 2012 (1)

• Around 80% opined that nutrition labelling was able to:
  – Promote public health and a balanced diet
  – Encourage the food trade to produce or develop healthy food products
  – Important to read before buying prepackaged food
  – Help making healthy food choices and deciding what to buy

• But only 52% thought that the nutrition claims were truthful
70% frequently read the nutrition label when they bought a food product for the first time

- Female (30-49)
- Attained matriculation or tertiary education
- Monthly household income of $30,000 or above
- Frequent purchasers of prepackage food
The message seems fairly simple, the need for an average adult is...

50g Sugar
i.e. 10 cubes

2000mg sodium
i.e. 1 teaspoon

Why so difficult for consumers to follow?
We **LOVE** eating! Food, drinks not only serve physical needs but also physiological and social needs!
When we are sad, happy or pressurized, the crave comes.
Getting more complicated, is the factors of lifestyle and culture.
The Power of Advertisement
Our Consumer Rights

- **Right to safety** – protection from products that are hazardous to health

- **Right to consumer education** – education and awareness about health risks

- **Right to be informed** – to know what is in our food and have protection from misleading marketing

- **Right to choose** – to have access to healthy, nutritious food
How can we make life easier for consumers?

We could hardly change the culture, but we can do better in managing our crave, and our lifestyle.

Consumers prefer
• Easy to understand
• Easy to remember
• Easy to action
• Easy to master
• Easy to become a habit

What we should offer...
• More choice for healthier and genuine healthy foods
• More tools and techniques
• More friendly disclosure
• More lively education
A Strategic Plan and Partnership

- Policy development
- Education
- Regulations enforcement
- Monitoring/tracking

Government

Policy Commitment Programmes

Consumer Protection Bodies / Concern Groups

Food Makers

- Responsible citizenship
- Accurate and clear information disclosure
- Redress mechanism

Consumers

- Surveillance
- Advocacy
- Education

- Proactive learning
- Commitment to change
- Supportive attitude & action

Consumer

Protection

Bodies / Concern Groups
Persistent efforts since 1974 to advise and alert Consumers

- Published about 700 articles / surveys / product tests related to food
- About 40 emphasized sugar and sodium
- First product test in 1978 on Oyster Sauce
- All Reports resulted in wide media coverage and consumer attention
Inaugural Issue

• In November 1974, first test report on food - edible oils
  – Quality of oil
  – Pricing comparison
  – Advice in storage of edible oil
The First Article for Sugar and Sodium

Feb, 1978 – product test: oyster sauce

October, 1980 – don’t be excessive in sugar intake
Other Examples of Major Reports

Feb 1994 (CHOICE 208)
Preserved sausage testing

Aug 1994 (CHOICE 214)
Preserved fish causes cancer

Sept 1994 (CHOICE 215)
Too much mooncake may be deleterious to health

Aug 2006 (CHOICE 358)
Bottled green tea drinks assessed for tea and sugar contents

Oct 2008 (CHOICE 384)
Avoid children’s breakfast cereals high in sugar, salt and fat

March 2010 (CHOICE 401)
It pays to read the nutrition label of instant noodles for healthier choice

April 2010 (CHOICE 402)
Nutrition labelling reveals wide variations in sodium and fat contents of canned sardines and luncheon meat

Oct 2012 (CHOICE 432)
Food Additives Not Fully Disclosed In Dried Fruit Snacks

Feb 2015 (CHOICE 460)
Caution on Holiday Binge on Traditional CNY Foods

March 2015 (CHOICE 461)
Wake-up Call to Parents on the Nutrition Level of Children’s Meal Sets
The downside of quick fixes

Consumer Council cites collagen supplements and instant noodles

By: GOODFELLERS

Many advertising campaigns tout the benefits of collagen supplements and instant noodle dishes, which are said to improve skin and hair quality.

However, experts have warned against these claims and urged consumers to be cautious.

"These products may promise instant results, but the scientific evidence to support their effectiveness is lacking," said Dr. Li, a dermatologist.

The Consumer Council has received complaints from consumers about the quality and safety of these products.

"We have found that some of these collagen supplements contain harmful substances and may cause adverse reactions," Dr. Li said.

Instant noodle dishes are also being criticized for their high salt and calorie content, which can contribute to health problems.

"These instant noodle dishes are convenient, but they are not a healthy option," said Dr. Li.

"Consumers should choose healthy alternatives that provide essential nutrients," he added.

The Consumer Council encourages consumers to read labels carefully and choose products that are free from harmful substances.

"Consumers should also be aware of the health risks associated with these products and take steps to improve their diet and lifestyle," Dr. Li said.

HEALTHY KIDS’ MEALS? FAT CHANCE!

Qi Long

Fast food and convenience foods have become a staple in many children’s diets.

However, experts warn that these meals are not a healthy option for children.

"Children need a balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, and whole grains," said Dr. Li.

"Fast food and convenience foods are high in calories and low in nutrients," he added.

The Consumer Council has received complaints from parents about the quality and safety of these products.

"We have found that some of these products contain harmful substances and may cause adverse reactions," Dr. Li said.

The Consumer Council encourages parents to choose healthy alternatives that provide essential nutrients.

"Parents should also be aware of the health risks associated with these products and take steps to improve their children’s diet and lifestyle," Dr. Li said.

Plaza Fu (Plaza) has already responded and promised to improve the quality of these products and reduce their salt and sugar levels.

"We take these complaints seriously and are committed to improving the quality of our products," said Plaza Fu.

"We are working closely with the Consumer Council to address these concerns and provide consumers with the healthy options they deserve," he added.

The Consumer Council applauds Plaza Fu’s commitment to improving the quality of its products.

"We appreciate Plaza Fu’s efforts to address these concerns," said Dr. Li.

"We look forward to seeing continued improvement in the quality of their products and providing consumers with the healthy options they deserve," he added.
Moving ahead...

- No silver bullet, but persistent and collaborative efforts to progress
- The formation of the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food
  - Establish clear strategic directions and implementation plan
  - Set medium and long term targets
  - Act together to promote healthy diets

Listen to the voice of consumers
Thank you