

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Food labeling - what you should look for

"Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About Food Labeling and Were Afraid to Ask"

Canadian consumers place concerns about nutrition above many other health issues, according to a recent survey by the National Institute of Nutrition. Nutrition leads the list, followed by stress, smoking and pesticides. The survey is quoted in the Summer 1992 issue of HeartHealth, the quarterly consumer newsletter of the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

According to HeartHealth, one of the major reasons behind this concern is a lack of clear understanding about what constitutes good nutrition. And food labels, as they presently exist, do little to help con-

sumers gain that understanding. For example, a full 7 out of 10 people surveyed believed that a "no-cholesterol" claim meant that the food contained less fat. This, of course, isn't the case.

A food such as french fries could be cholesterol free, but loaded with fats. And it's actually fat that affects blood cholesterol levels.

Although nutrition labeling guidelines have existed for some time in Canada, they are not mandatory and not always consistent. For example, consumers are confused about other claims such as "calorie reduced", "low in fat" and "low sodium" and are not satisfied with existing label formats. Complexity and lack of clarity are their biggest

complaints. What shoppers would like, according to the NIN study, is clear, standardized presentations with bigger and brighter print.

The HeartHealth article concludes by saying that pressure from consumers will continue to encourage food producers to include more information on their product labels.

Reprinted from HeartHealth, published by the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

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