Health & Physical Education activities for Levels 4 and 5

Food and you – the importance of food labelling for health

CORE EDUCATION Tātai Aho Rau

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

Exploring the Food Standards Code

Information contained in food labelling can be used to support people's well-being.

Brainstorm health and well-being related reasons why people need to know what is in the food they are eating. Do they have a health condition, or cultural restrictions around some food? Are they trying to achieve a specific goal, such as weight loss, muscle development, maintaining a balanced diet, or having a baby?

Students use their digital devices to access the **Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code** – scroll down the page – the list at the bottom of the page contains clues to the purpose of the Code.

In pairs decide:

- What (in broad terms) the Food Standards Code is about?
- Why does it exist?
- Who is it for?
- Who was involved in developing it?
- Who monitors the Food Standards Code in New Zealand?
- How is the Food Standards Code updated?

Risk Analysis

In the early 1960s the World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation formed the *Codex Alimentarius Commission*. The purpose of the Codex is to develop international food standards and guidelines, to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade.

The Codex has developed a risk analysis framework for assessing food-borne risks.

Use the document **Risk Analysis in Food Regulation** to learn about risk analysis and the Codex.

- What are the three key components of the Codex risk analysis framework?
- What sort of things does Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) use this framework for?
- What is meant by 'risk appetite'?
- Explore the principles underlying risk analysis and discuss the importance of at least one of these for a particular food product.

Food Labelling

The Food Standards Code requires food producers and retailers to provide adequate labelling on food. Food labels can provide a wide range of information to help consumers make food choices. See **Labelling** for more information. Have your students explore the **interactive labelling poster**.

1. A selection of these labelling requirements is provided below. Allocate one requirement to each pair of students.
    - Food identification and a statement of ingredients and characterising ingredients and components of food – a statement that says what sort of food stuffs are contained in the product.

- Warning statements, advisory statements and declarations – such as allergen labels – contain wheat, may contain traces of nuts or made in a factory where products containing nuts are made.
- Date marking of food for sale – the 'use by' date.
- Directions for use and storage e.g. how to use the product and whether it has to be refrigerated or used in a certain time once opened.
- Nutrition information requirements, e.g. the proportion of sugars, other carbohydrates, protein, and fat.
- Nutrition, health and related claims, e.g. low fat, reduced salt, no added sugar.
- Country of origin labelling requirements – of the whole product or certain ingredients within the product.
- Food additives, e.g. colouring agents, preservatives, taste enhancers etc.
- Vitamins and minerals – either added to or already present in the food.
- Processing aids – substances or foods added to perform a technological purpose during the process, e.g. reducing bacterial contamination (These substances don't remain in the food).
- Food produced using gene technology – or 'genetically engineered'/GE food, which may be the whole product or ingredients in the product.

2. First make sure students know (in basic terms) what each requirement is about. Then have students answer the two following questions:
    - What sort of people do you think would want to know this information, because it would support their well-being?
    - How could knowing this information about food support the well-being of these people? Try to identify at least two of: physical, social, mental and emotional or spiritual well-being.
3. Share summaries of answers to questions with the class by compiling them into a table using the digital learning platform (or use an app that allows small amounts of information to be shared and collected quickly in a single document/viewing screen).
4. In discussion with the class, draw conclusions about the importance of food labelling for well-being.

Analysing health and nutrition claims on food labels

Analysing health and nutrition claims on food labels

Nutrition content claims and health claims are voluntary statements made by food businesses on labels and advertising. Nutrition content claims are about the content of certain nutrients or substances in a food, such as 'low in fat' or 'good source of calcium'. Health claims refer to a substantiated relationship between a food and health. See **Nutrition, health and related claims** and **Getting Your Claims Right** for more information. Students can critically analyse health and nutrition claims in food labelling or advertsing, and determine whether or not the labelling is 'health promoting'.

1. Collect examples of a range of food labels or advertising for foods that make health or nutrition claims e.g. low fat, reduced salt, no added sugar, gluten free, nut free, lose weight, gain muscle. Each pair of students will need two food labels or advertisements – one that makes a health claim and one that makes a nutrition claim. The full nutritional information must be available for each example – this may be sourced online from the food producer's website, or from actual product packaging.

2. Provide students with the following table that includes information from the Food Standards Code. Check that students understand what the text means. As a class, sort your collected food labels and advertising into different types of health effects, using the table below for guidance (for example, Omega 3 is important for cognitive performance (example of mental performance), calcium is important for strong teeth and bones (example of physiological process).

Table 1

Health claim means a claim which states, suggests or implies that a food or a property of food has, or may have, a health effect on the human body, including an effect on one or more of the following:
• a biochemical process or outcome • a physiological process or outcome • a functional process or outcome • growth and development • physical performance • mental performance • a disease, disorder or condition.

3. Provide students with the following table that includes information from the Food Standards Code. Check that students understand what the text means. As a class, sort your collected food labels and advertising into different types of nutrition content claims, using the table below for guidance (for example, calcium is a mineral, folate is a vitamin).

Table 2

Nutrition content claims can be about the presence or absence of any of the following:
• a biologically active substance • dietary fibre • energy • minerals • potassium • protein • carbohydrate • fat • the components of any one of protein, carbohydrate or fat • salt • sodium • vitamins • glycaemic index or glycaemic load.

4. Have students work in pairs to analyse the food product information on their two food labels or advertisements. Have them answer the following questions:

   - What is the difference between a health claim and a nutrition claim?
   - How is a health claim related to the nutrition content, and how is a nutrition claim related to a health effect?
   - For your health claim example, what is the claim being made about the health effect of the product on people who eat the food? Is this a general level health claim or a high level health claim (see **Nutrition, health and related claims**)? Is the health claim related to a specific part of the nutritional content?
   - For your nutrition claim example, what claim is being made? Why is this claim being made? How does this claim relate to health?
   - As a consumer, what other information do you need to know to understand whether or not the health claims are true? (For example, expected daily nutritional levels for specific substances across different age groups, portion size and therefore how much of the product needs to be eaten for these health claims to apply, how substances are used by the body that result in health effects, being able to think critically about claims being made and in whose interests the claims are being made and so on.)
   - Who do you think benefits from this information? How do they benefit? Think about all dimensions of well-being.
   - Do you think anyone could be disadvantaged by this information? Why or why not?

5. As a class or in groups, look at the following points taken from the Food Standards Code and discuss the reasons why these statements might have been included in the Food Standards Code. Consider the possible consequences if these rules were absent from the Food Standards Code.

   - The Food Standards Code states that a nutrition content claim or health claim must not be made about an infant formula product, or a food that contains more than 1.15% alcohol by volume (other than a nutrition content claim about its energy content, carbohydrate content or gluten content; or the salt or sodium content about a food that is not a beverage.)
   - The Food Standards Code states that nutrition content claims must not imply slimming effects and cannot directly or indirectly refer to slimming or a synonym for slimming.
   - The Food Standards Code states that health claims cannot be therapeutic in nature – that is, a claim must not refer to the prevention, diagnosis, cure or alleviation of a disease, disorder or condition.

6. Have students investigate what rights consumers have if they think food labelling is sub-standard (incorrect, misleading, or lacking detail)? How can they use the Food Standards Code to support their case? Students can begin by looking at the consumers section of the **food standards website**.

Health Star Rating

The Health Star Rating (HSR) system was developed by Australian state and territory governments in collaboration with industry, public health and consumer groups. The aim was: To provide convenient, relevant and readily understood nutrition information and/or guidance on food packs to assist consumers to make informed food purchases and healthier eating choices.

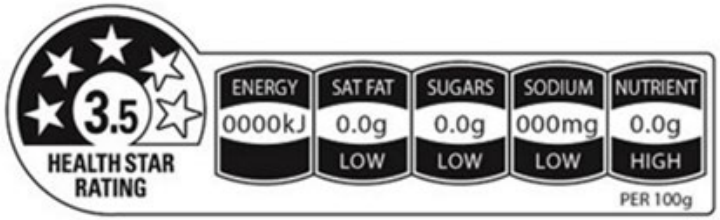
New Zealand joined the HSR system following:

- assessment of the system against the set of principles developed by the New Zealand Front of Pack Labelling Advisory Group, and
- after consumer testing in New Zealand and found that consumers could readily differentiate between products.

For more information of the HSR see the **MPI website**.

It's important to note that the use of Health Stars is not intended to be used to compare all foods. Instead it is meant to be used when comparing similar foods in the same category, e.g. when comparing one type of breakfast cereal with another.

1. Introduce the students to the Health Star Rating system. Have some examples of HSR labelled food (or have images) to show them. Ask students to think about other similar systems (e.g., energy rating).
2. Survey students' views to see:
   - How many students have seen the 'stars' on packaging?
   - How many students have used the stars to make a decision about which product to buy?
3. Play the advertising video: **How Health Star Ratings Work**. What message is the video trying to get across and why?



4. Currently the HSR is voluntary in New Zealand. Discuss the pluses and minuses in this being a voluntary system?

5. Check out the **companies** that are currently displaying the HSR.

    - What are the advantages and disadvantages for companies to use the HSR?
    - What are the advantages and disadvantages for consumers?

6. Why is the HSR system focused on packaged foods only?

Take action

In pairs or groups, take a trip to your local supermarket. Identify the range of food products that have an HSR rating and those that don't.

As a class answer the following:

- What types of products seem to dominate the 'use HSR' list?
- What about the 'don't use' list?

Discuss differing views within the class about the HSR.

You may like to raise the following points to support the discussion:

- The Health Star Ratings were never intended to be the only solution to helping consumers eat healthily. Instead, they are only one tool in a suite of tools that can help with healthy eating choices and it is not intended to be used in isolation from other dietary advice.
- Consumers should also pay attention to further information provided on the Nutrition Information Panel, for example, portion sizes, and advice on diet and exercise from the Ministry of Health. For information about a healthy and balanced diet, visit the Health Ed website – **https://www.healthed.govt.nz/**
- Most people already understand that unpackaged foods, such as fruit and veggies, are good for you, it can be harder for people to understand the nutritional value of packaged foods.
- It's important to note that the use of Health Stars is not intended to be used to compare all foods. Instead it is meant to be used when comparing similar foods in the same category, e.g. when comparing one type of breakfast cereal with another.

What could students do to educate their local community about the HSR and identify the differing views that people have about the system?

In groups have students develop a report or presentation to share the results their investigation into the Health Star Rating system.