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# NUTRITIONAL LABELLING

## Position Statement - Updated: November 2021

### Why have we produced this position statement?

- Clear and consistent nutrition labelling is important to people living with diabetes, those at risk of developing type 2 diabetes and the general public.
- At the moment, nutritional information is often confusing and inconsistent, or even absent in out-of-home settings.
- Evidence supports a positive impact of nutrition labelling on improved knowledge and encouraging healthier purchasing.[1]
- Everyone should be able to access quality nutritional information about their food wherever they eat and drink, so that they can make informed choices.
- People treating their diabetes with a basal/bolus insulin regime via injections, insulin pumps and using closed loop technology also require accurate information about the carbohydrate content of all their food and drink in order to calculate and adjust their meal time and snacks. There are currently gaps in provision of this information, for example baked goods.

### How did we develop this position?

We reviewed national and international evidence on nutritional labelling. We also conducted focus groups in England, Scotland and Wales to gather the opinions of people living with diabetes. We conducted research through ComRes on the general publics'opinions on food labelling and conducted our own survey with supporters.

### What we say about this issue

Governments across the UK and the food industry both need to take urgent action to improve provision of nutritional information, in and out of the home.

**Diabetes UK Recommendations for governments:**

- UK governments should legislate to make front of pack traffic light labelling mandatory.
- Guidance on the back-of-pack labelling system should be improved to help ensure labels are more consistent. Carbohydrates should be displayed both per serving and per 100g. There should be a consistent approach to whether these values apply to the product as sold or as prepared.
- The UK government should make recommendations as to the best way to clearly and consistently display information on free sugars. At present existing labelling only requires total sugars to be displayed, which include those naturally occurring in whole fruit and dairy products. These naturally occurring sugars are not linked to poor health. However, the maximum recommended daily amount for free sugar (those sugars added to products but also found in syrups, honey, fruit juice, smoothies and purees) is just 30g (adults) due to its adverse health effects.[2] This recommendation is much lower than total sugars and as it is currently not possible

to decipher free sugar content on packaging this makes is potentially misleading in terms of health.

- They should also take action to increase the understanding of the difference between total sugars and free sugars amongst the general public.
- All governments across the UK should evaluate the role out of calorie labelling in large out of home settings when this comes into force in England and should continually review effectiveness, giving consideration to expanding the role out to smaller businesses.
- Information should be displayed on menus showing an explanation of the daily recommended intake of calories for an adult woman, in order to contextualize the figures for individual dishes.
- In addition, legislation in all UK nations should ensure that full nutritional information is provided for all products sold in an out-of-home setting. This information should be available both in store and online, with traffic-light colour coding applied to fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.
- Governments in all four nations of the UK should supply tools, or make specific recommendations for commercial tools, that businesses can use to calculate calorie and other nutritional information for their food.
- Any changes to the current traffic light labelling system, must involve robust user testing and real world research. Significant public awareness and education will also be required.
- Further research is needed to understand the role of nutritional labelling in promoting reformulation of products and how labelling affects consumption behaviour as much of the research to date looks at purchasing

### Diabetes UK Recommendations for the food industry:

- Retail stores and food manufacturers should take urgent action to ensure that all their products display front-of-pack traffic light labelling.
- In the out-of-home sector, restaurants, cafes and takeways should urgently act to:
    - adopt calorie-labelling on menus or at the point of choice for all their products,
    - provide clear information on the carbohydrate content of all their products both in store and online
    - provide information on the fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt content of their food and drink, both in store and online, using the traffic-light colour coding system.
    - It is important that nutritional labelling on packaging is accessible to those with visual impairment. Diabetes is the leading cause of preventable sight loss in the UK[3], and therefore Diabetes UK supports the recommendations outlined by the Royal National Institute of Blind People[4].

## Evidence and Analysis

### Front of pack labelling

- The UKs voluntary front-of-pack labelling scheme was introduced in 2013, with the aim of providing consumers with clear and consistent nutritional

information and enabling them to balance their diet and manage their energy intake[5].

- Evidence shows that the labelling system is valuable to consumers[6].
- Information from retailers has shown that purchases of healthier-labelled products increased and sales of less-healthy products decreased following introduction of front-of-pack colour-coded labelling[7]
- The UK's current front-of-pack traffic light labelling system is popular with the public – 83% of British adults say the UK government should require by law that the food and drink industry include traffic light labelling on all food and drink packaging[8].
- Eighty-seven per cent agreed that traffic-light labelling helps people make informed choices about the food they buy[9].
- Research shows interpretative front of pack labelling, such as the current UK traffic light labelling system, which include colours or symbols may help people to choose healthier items and improve understanding of nutrition information[10]. Interpretative messaging alongside nutrition information may further support healthy purchasing behaviour[11]
- The UK traffic light labelling system is also useful for people following specific diets or modifying their intake of specific nutrients (for example salt).
- Front of pack labelling compared to no labelling may also encourage healthier purchasing choices in relation to specific nutrients such as sugar or sodium[12].

## Out-of-home labelling

- A 2018 Cochrane review found that nutritional labelling comprising energy information on menus may reduce energy purchased in restaurants[13].
- According to one meta-analysis, the inclusion of contextual and interpretative information in out-of-home settings, for example daily recommended calorie intake, led to a statistically significant difference in calories selected and consumed[14].
- Items from restaurants that provide menu labelling have been shown to contain less fat and salt compared to restaurants with no labelling[15]
- In the UK, over a quarter of adults and one fifth of children eat food from out-of-home outlets at least once a week[16]. These foods tend to be higher in energy intake, fat, sugar and salt[17].
- Out-of-home calorie labelling is popular with the public – 76% of British adults agree that cafes and restaurants should display calorie information on their menus so that customers are informed about the calorie content of the food and drinks they buy[18].

## References


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