

Bangers and facts

Supermarkets should use clear, consistent labelling to tell us what goes into foods like the great British banger

We all like to treat ourselves occasionally to favourite foods such as sausages, cakes and ready meals. But trying to work out which have the least fat or salt could give you a headache rather than an appetite.

Front-of-pack labelling

Which? has long called for simpler labels, so busy shoppers can see at a glance which processed foods contain high, medium or low amounts of nutrients such as fat. We've warned that shoppers are confused by the different schemes seen in various supermarkets.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) recently published research on front-of-pack nutrition labels, which concluded that the best label for shoppers is one with traffic light colours, nutrient weights, guideline daily amounts (GDA) and the words high, medium or low.

The FSA is due to make its final recommendation later this year. The government says that once this recommendation is made, it wants the food industry to adopt a single labelling approach.

Why we need simpler food labels

The kind of label that consumers found most useful in the FSA's research, is already used by Asda. As you can see from the sausage labels (right), it uses the four elements the FSA recommends. You can clearly see the sausages are high in saturated fat, medium in salt and fat.

The Marks & Spencer label uses traffic light colours, which help you see the sausages are high in fat and saturated fat. However, it does not use the words low, medium and high.

Tesco's pastel label causes particular confusion. In the FSA's research, a number of consumers interpreted the use of pale green on a nutrient such as fat as meaning low even when percentage GDAs were high.

When we applied traffic lights to the Tesco sausages, they scored a red for

Which? backs the label used by Asda, which is most easily understood by busy shoppers

sat fat and salt and amber for fat – but they're both shown in shades of green.

Asda said it uses its nutrition label on more than 1,000 products and is 'urging other food manufacturers and retailers to end the debate and listen to the customers.'

What will other supermarkets do?

However, when we asked the other major supermarkets how quickly they'd be adopting the best labels for consumers, most responses weren't promising. None said they'd be changing their labels in light of the new evidence.

The UK government can't enforce this labelling – only EU regulations can. We'll

campaign to ensure regulations encourage food companies to use it. We also call on all food companies to adopt the label.

Miranda Watson, food campaigner at Which?, says: 'Most of us spend only seconds glancing at food labels so a clear, consistent scheme is important to help people spot how much fat, sugar and salt is going into their shopping basket.'

'The new research couldn't be clearer. All retailers and manufacturers need to stop confusing consumers with different schemes and adopt the combined label.'

FINDING OUT WHAT'S IN YOUR FOOD

The type of label already used by Asda was easiest to understand, the FSA found

ASDA ✓



M&S ✗



TESCO ✗



MORRISONS ✗



