

# Letters to Parents



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Department of Health

## Prepackaged Food

Dear Parents,

Have you ever been attracted to buy prepackaged foods because they have claims on 'no additives', 'organic', 'natural', 'low fat', 'reduced fat', and so on?

How true are these claims? When the nutritional labelling law pertaining to prepackaged food comes into force, we need to learn reading nutritional labels so as to understand the nutritional value of food and make an informed choice.

Firstly, we need to remind ourselves that hasty decisions based on misleading information could end up buying the wrong product. Take drinks that claim to contain 'no additives' as an example. Customers may think these products contain no preservatives, colourings or other artificial substances, thus considered as natural and healthy, yet overlook ingredients that may be harmful to health. Indeed, there is no scientific evidence of harm caused by taking legal food additives. On the other hand, nutrition or medical experts who are concerned about children's health point out the adverse impact of over-consumption of foods high in sugar or fat. Many so-called 'healthful drinks', e.g. bottled green tea, herbal tea, chocolate milk or yogurt drinks, contain a relatively high sugar content. Hence, to choose low-sugar and low-fat products, parents should check the product nutritional labels to determine whether the sugar content is 5g or below and the fat content is 1.5g or below per 100ml. Even for drinks with low-sugar and fat content, over-consumption still poses a risk of obesity. Hence, no more than 250ml (about 1 glass) of these drinks should be served to children at one time.

A number of products claim themselves to contain 'reduced sugar' and 'reduced fat'. What does this actually mean? Unlike 'Nutrient Content Claims' of 'low fat', 'low sugar' and 'high calcium', these 'Nutrient Comparative Claims' aim to compare the nutrient levels of two or more similar food products. For example, Potato Chip A claims to have 'lower fat' when comparing its fat content with that of Potato Chip B. However, it does not necessarily mean that Potato Chip A is a low fat product (i.e. less than 3g of fat per 100g of food). In general, 'Nutrient Content Claims' directly describe the level of a nutrient contained in a food. When read together with nutritional labelling information, the meaning of these claims becomes clearer.

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To check out more about food labelling and snack selection, please visit the websites below:

Centre for Food Safety – Nutritional Labelling Scheme

[https://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew\\_act/whatsnew\\_act\\_19\\_Nutrition\\_Labelling\\_Scheme.html](https://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_act/whatsnew_act_19_Nutrition_Labelling_Scheme.html)

Department of Health – Nutritional Guidelines on Snacks for Student

[https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/snack\\_guidelines\\_bi.pdf](https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/snack_guidelines_bi.pdf)

Dietitian

'EatSmart@school.hk' Campaign

Department of Health



For more information, please visit Department of Health EatSmart Website [www.eatsmart.gov.hk](http://www.eatsmart.gov.hk)