

Food label reading by consumers who buy foodstuff from the market

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Madam, the regulation of food labelling started with the Pure Food Ordinance of 1960. The primary purpose of this regulation was to eradicate the doctoring of food. All the rules of this ordinance were found in sections 13 and 14 of the Pure Food Rules of 1965.¹

In this regulation, it was stated that all pre-packaged foods should indicate the name of the food, the address of the manufacturer, all the ingredients present, as well as the weight of the food. The labels were not allowed to make claims about vitamins and minerals present in the food unless they were found in an approved list. It was also stated that all the labels should be in English as well as in Urdu.¹

The use of food labels can give the consumers the option to make better food choices which results in a more nutritious diet.² Nutrition labels can also be beneficial for those who are at a higher risk for chronic diseases and who need to follow specific diets such as low sodium or a low fat diet, which may lead to a decrease in the risk of chronic diseases like coronary heart disease, osteoporosis, cancer etc. This decrement in the risk of diseases can further lower the healthcare costs in terms of doctor visits, medications, and hospitalisation, therefore decreasing the economic burden on people. There would be less absentees from work and thus no loss of wages.²

Research has shown that those people whose primary source of information regarding the ingredients of different foodstuffs includes books, magazines, radio, television and newspapers are less prone to make use of the information present on the food labels when they go to the market, as compared to those whose primary

source of information are food labels. It is a possibility that people who have other sources of information might even face confusing messages regarding the ingredients in the food.²

It has been seen through research that education also has an impact on the reading of food labels. Usage of food labels may require a few calculations, therefore those with more education are much more capable of understanding the information present on it.²

It is also seen that individuals who are unemployed spend more time on using the information on nutrition labels as compared to those who have a job. This may be due to the time constraints and the overload of information on the labels.²

To encourage food label reading habit in Pakistani consumers, the labels should be presented in simplified form with complete information so that it can even be understood by less educated individuals.² The nutrients' information on the food product should be written in both English and in Urdu so that there is no language barrier.¹ It is the responsibility of the nutrition educators to design the labels in such a way that maximum information about a particular food product can be evaluated by the consumer in minimum amount of time.²

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References

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