

Food Package and Retail Shelf Icon Systems

The American Heart Association's Position

- The American Heart Association favors the Food and Drug Administration establishing a directed, standardized, comprehensive front-of-package food labeling program and icon system with unified criteria based upon the best available science and consumer research, featuring consumer education as a primary goal along with healthier food selection and consumption.
- If a single, unified system is created, sufficient resources must be committed to the management and enforcement of the program, criteria, and rules.
- The system should be generalized to the entire U.S. population—it should not be disease-specific—highlighting foods and nutrients that are “good for you” and those that should be avoided.
- All foods and beverages should be considered for display of the icon with manufacturers responsible for producing current lab analyses for their products.
- Government or third-party oversight would confirm this testing with regular spot-checks.
- The process should be objective and specific, transparent, adaptable to accommodate a wide range of foods and beverages, easily understandable to the general public, and financed without the appearance of conflict of interest.
- The process for implementing such a system, monitoring and updating needs to be streamlined, timely, and efficient
- The optimal program should reference the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine Dietary Reference Intakes Reports.
- There should be an effective, tested, and proven accompanying nutrition education campaign focused on calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, added sugars, nutrient density, and portion control.
- Consumer testing should be conducted in advance of establishing any system to validate that it will be easy to understand, relevant, and useful to consumers.
- Importantly, the program must include appropriate and robust enforcement and monitoring, including components such as random sampling in the marketplace.
- Finally, the program should be evaluated every five years to ensure its standards are consistent with current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Dietary Reference Intakes and if not, the standards should be modified to comply.

Fast Facts:

1. A consumer survey showed that consumers are confused about what is healthy, which is a major barrier to making healthier choices.¹
2. Consumers indicate they would like front-of-package labeling to help them make quicker decisions as they shop.²
3. Recent research indicates that Front-of-Pack (FOP) labeling can influence consumers' understanding of the healthfulness of foods,^{3,4,5,6} including individuals who are more nutritionally at risk.⁷
4. Some research indicates that FOP labeling can also influence purchasing patterns.^{8,9}

Progress to Date

The American Heart Association created its food certification program in 1995, because it recognized the value of this type of consumer education program in adopting heart-healthy dietary guidelines at the time and place that consumers make selection decisions and because the FDA had insufficient resources to monitor or manage such a program. The AHA will evaluate the environment carefully to determine its role in the evolution of a unified system.

For more information and resources from the American Heart Association's policy research department or nutrition policy positions please visit: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/policy-research>.

¹ NMI Health and Wellness Trends Database. 2017 Consumer Survey of 3,207 general population consumers.

² Acton, R.B., Vanderlee, L. and Hammond, D., 2018. Influence of front-of-package nutrition labels on beverage healthiness perceptions: Results from a randomized experiment. *Preventive medicine*. Access on September 13, 2018 at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743518302536?via%3Dihub>

³ Khandpur, N., de Moraes Sato, P., Mais, L.A., Bortoletto Martins, A.P., Spinillo, C.G., Garcia, M.T., Urquizar Rojas, C.F. and Jaime, P.C., 2018. Are Front-of-Package Warning Labels More Effective at Communicating Nutrition Information than Traffic-Light Labels? A Randomized Controlled Experiment in a Brazilian Sample. *Nutrients*, 10(6), p.688.

⁴ Lundberg, P.J., Graham, D.J. and Mohr, G.S., 2018. Comparison of two front-of-package nutrition labeling schemes, and their explanation, on consumers' perception of product healthfulness and food choice. *Appetite*, 125, pp.548-556. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29496604>

⁵ Roseman, M.G., Jung, H.W. and Littlejohn, E.I., 2018. Attitude and Behavior Factors Associated with Front-of-Package Label Use with Label Users Making Accurate Product Nutrition Assessments. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 118(5), pp.904-912.

⁶ Findling, M.T.G., Werth, P.M., Musick, A.A., Bragg, M.A., Graham, D.J., Elbel, B. and Roberto, C.A., 2018. Comparing five front-of-pack nutrition labels' influence on consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions. *Preventive medicine*, 106, pp.114-121.

⁷ Ducrot, P., Méjean, C., Julia, C., Kesse-Guyot, E., Touvier, M., Fezeu, L.K., Hercberg, S. and Péneau, S., 2015. Objective understanding of front-of-package nutrition labels among nutritionally at-risk individuals. *Nutrients*, 7(8), pp.7106-7125.

⁸ Khandpur, N., de Moraes Sato, P., Mais, L.A., Bortoletto Martins, A.P., Spinillo, C.G., Garcia, M.T., Urquizar Rojas, C.F. and Jaime, P.C., 2018. Are Front-of-Package Warning Labels More Effective at Communicating Nutrition Information than Traffic-Light Labels? A Randomized Controlled Experiment in a Brazilian Sample. *Nutrients*, 10(6), p.688.

⁹ Finkelstein, E.A., Li, W., Melo, G., Strombotne, K. and Zhen, C., 2018. Identifying the effect of shelf nutrition labels on consumer purchases: results of a natural experiment and consumer survey. *The American journal of clinical nutrition*, 107(4), pp.647-651.