



food matters

with Consultant Nutritionist Sue Radd

new food laws hit

Food products manufactured on or after December 20, 2002, as a result of new legislation are required to disclose more information on their packaging.

a summary:

Nearly all packaged foods need to include a nutrition information panel listing the levels of the following nutrients: energy, protein, total fat, saturated fat (new requirement), carbohydrate, sugars and sodium (salt). Exceptions to the rule are very small packages and foods such as spices, tea, coffee, alcohol and single ingredient foods, such as vegetables, fruit, water, meat, fish and poultry.

Packaged foods are now required to show the percentage of their characterising ingredient. For example, the percentage of strawberries in "strawberry" yoghurt.

Manufacturers are required to declare all major allergens present in foods, regardless of how small their quantity, for example, peanuts and other nuts, seafood, fish, milk, gluten, eggs and soya beans.

how the changes affect you

These changes will benefit the consumer by revealing more information about processed products, enabling more informed food choices.

"It's estimated that mandatory nutrition information labelling alone will result in between 320 and 460 fewer deaths from diet-related disease each year," says Ian Lindenmayer, managing director of Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the industry's regulating body. Diet-related risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity and type-2 diabetes.

While more than 90 per cent of consumers welcomed these changes, research has found that approximately 80 per cent felt they could not fully understand the new labels.

more information

FSANZ has launched a new booklet called *The Official Shopper's Guide to Food Additives and Labels* to give people the information they need in understanding food labels. This is available in larger bookstores. Alternatively, go to the Sanitarium web site <www.sanitarium.com.au> or <www.sanitarium.co.nz>, where you'll find further information on reading food labels.