

# NUTRIENT PROFILES – SETTING LIMITS FOR HEALTH ADVERTISING



**Vitamin C for your immune system, calcium for strong bones:** foods advertised with claims like these that promise health benefits are very popular with consumers. However, many of these products are high in sugar, fat or salt. Upper limits for these nutrients (called nutrient profiles) could prevent unjustified health claims.

Health and nutrition claims can only be included on food packaging or used to advertise food if the effect on health has been scientifically proven. Since 2006, this has been governed by the EU's Regulation on nutrition and health claims. The Regulation also provides for the introduction of nutrient profiles: upper limits specifying the maximum sugar, fat or salt content in a product for it to be allowed to carry a health claim. However, the European Commission has so far failed to come up with the necessary concept and, in fact, is currently considering whether to remove the principle of nutrient profiles

from the Regulation altogether as part of the REFIT process to simplify EU law. The reason given is that, under the EU's Regulation on food information, nutritional values on packaged food must be stated in a standardised manner from December 2016 so that consumers have all the necessary information.



However, nutrient profiles are not an aspect of labelling and information but a threshold value – the only way to ensure that products containing too much sugar, fat or salt cannot be advertised using health claims.

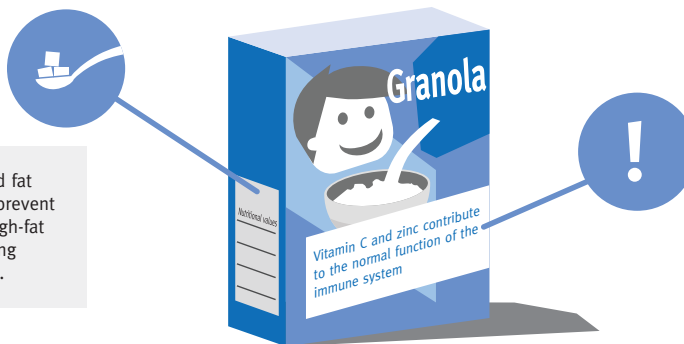
## CLARITY AT A GLANCE ON THE SUPERMARKET SHELVES

### Almost a quarter sugar

100 g of this granola contain 24 g of sugar.

Upper limits for salt, sugar and fat (nutrient profiles) are vital to prevent high-energy, high-sugar and high-fat sweets, snacks and drinks being advertised using health claims.

Quelle: vzbv



### Nutrient profiles set limits for health claims

Based on the nutrient profile of the World Health Organization (WHO) this type of product would not be allowed to contain more than 10 g of sugar per 100 g if it was to carry a health claim.

## VZBV'S POSITION



**Finally introduce nutrient profiles:** they are an essential element of the Regulation on nutrition and health claims and must not be removed from it. If there are no nutrient profiles, even sweets, salty and fatty snacks and sugary drinks can carry a health claim and suggest that they offer health benefits. Consumers then choose what appears to be a healthy alternative but actually contains a lot of calories. This contributes to the problem of overweight, which is faced by a growing number of consumers.



**Follow existing guidelines:** the nutrient profiles published by the WHO designed to limit the advertising of unhealthy children's products already provide a

basis that has been accepted by many stakeholders. The Regulation on nutrition and health claims should follow this guidance.



**Support competition for quality:** strict nutrient profiles would mean that health claims could only be used to advertise food whose nutritional content does not have a potentially negative impact on the body. This would transform health claims into a sign of quality for manufacturers that would enable them to stand out from competitors. Products that exceed the upper limits could still be sold but could no longer be advertised as healthy.

verbraucherzentrale

Bundesverband

## FACTS AND FIGURES

**i** Food that supposedly has additional health benefits is popular with consumers, with the proportion of food revenue accounted for by such products rising from 1.5 percent in 2001 to almost 5 percent in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

**i** The 2015 Consumer Barometer from KPMG reveals that for 82.3 percent of those surveyed their health is of great importance to them. They believe that eating properly plays the biggest role. For this reason, three quarters of consumers look out for healthy food. Of those surveyed, 66.3 percent are willing to pay more for products that promote good health and 77.6 percent expect to see such products on supermarket shelves.<sup>2</sup>

**i** A market check conducted by the German consumer associations (Verbraucherzentralen) found that one third of the examined products carrying a permitted health claim were too high in fat or sugar.<sup>3</sup>

**i** In addition, 40 percent of the products examined bore health claims that are not permitted under the European Commission's rules. Foodstuff for children scored particularly badly. Seven in ten products were found to carry health-related claims that are not permitted or are misleading.<sup>4</sup>

## HEALTHY PRODUCT WITH CONSEQUENCES



Healthy eating is important to the Keller family. Every morning, muesli and fresh fruit can be found on the breakfast table. As the youngest daughter Marlene cannot tolerate fresh fruit, her mother Iris buys muesli containing a mixture of dried fruit and cereal. "Vitamin C and zinc contribute to the normal function of the immune system", claims the packaging. The 41-year-old is confident that she is serving her child something good so she is happy for Marlene to occasionally have another bowl of muesli in the afternoon. After a while, she notices that her daughter has put on weight, even though she barely eats any sweets. Iris talks to a friend who is a nutritionist and finds out that some products promoted as being especially healthy contain surprising quantities of particular nutrients.

### Deceptive packaging of muesli – on the trail of the manufacturers

The fruit muesli purchased by the Keller family is high in sugar and mum Iris feels deceived. After all, she believed that the product, which featured a health claim, was also healthy in terms of its sugar, fat and salt content. She resolves to check the nutritional values on all food labels from now on. But how will she know how much sugar etc. is too much? She would like to be able to see at a glance whether a product provides grounds for concern or not. Nutrient profiles could give shoppers clarity and confidence. Foods whose sugar, salt or fat content exceeds a certain threshold could no longer be advertised using health claims.

1 Milliardenumsätze mit „Health Claims“ [„Health Claims“ Generate Billions in Revenue], Sonja Brandenburg and Marc Birringer, Ernährung Umschau, issue 8, 2014.

2 KPMG Consumer Barometer on Health, issue 2/2015, <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2015/06/consumerbarometer-2-2015-gesundheit-KPMG.pdf>.

3 Lebensmittel mit Gesundheitsversprechen – wirklich gesünder? [Foods with Health Claims – Are They Really Healthier?], Germany-wide survey by the consumer advice centres, December 2014, [http://www.vzh.de/ernaehrung/364923/Marktcheck\\_Health\\_Claims\\_Langfassung.pdf](http://www.vzh.de/ernaehrung/364923/Marktcheck_Health_Claims_Langfassung.pdf), page 14.

4 See above for source, [http://www.vzh.de/ernaehrung/364923/Marktcheck\\_Health\\_Claims\\_Langfassung.pdf](http://www.vzh.de/ernaehrung/364923/Marktcheck_Health_Claims_Langfassung.pdf), page 10.